

Displacement in Iraq after 2003: Coerced decisions in a time of crisis

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Abstract

This is a refugee-centred study of the decision making process of Iraqis displaced after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. It investigates the pressures and influences that affected their decisions as well as who was involved and consulted. In doing so it sheds light on the under-theorised issue of what it means to be forced into a migration decision. The meaning of coercion is examined and applied to a forced migration context, considering the dynamics of cumulative causation in the process. The study also attempts to advance understandings of the relationship between state-formation and displacement. Narratives of Iraqis forced to migrate to Syria after 2003 were collected between June 2010 and April 2011 and form the primary data in this study. Narrative methods were used to elicit extended testimonies from Iraqis in Syria in order to explore conceptual issues.

The research demonstrates the complex nature of forced migration and how displacement can be experienced as a process. Transformations of state which occurred in Iraq after the 2003 invasion led to purges which affected numerous groups perceived to belong to the old order. Iraqis who were perceived to be associated - rightly or wrongly - with the former regime experienced pressures and threats which resulted in some of them becoming migrants. The same transformations also manifested themselves as coercive alterations of spaces in Iraqis' daily lives. In a climate of generalised violence and insecurity, an array of threats and pressures, including those resulting from the dynamics of cumulative causation, combined to form what the author calls a *coercive landscape*: a social world in which choices are diminished and life is heavily constrained by a multiplicity of threats – and which is likely to induce mass displacement. Although grounded in a specifically Iraqi context, it may be useful for scholars to test this concept in other contexts of mass displacement.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Faieda and Abdul Kadir Ali, who instilled in me the value of knowledge and education and always encourage me to seek more.

Introduction

“Refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances” (Harrell-Bond, 1999: 58) and their “history has been actively forgotten” (Kushner, 2006: 47). In the coming pages I show that refugees are ordinary people responding to coercive circumstances. I document the experiences of Iraqis displaced by post-2003 political transformations which themselves have roots in historical transformations. Their experiences form case studies through which I address an under-developed conceptual issue in forced migration studies: what it means to be forced to migrate. In the field of Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies, this is a term which has received little conceptual examination but one used widely and taken for granted.

Iraq's modern history has been characterised by many displacements relating to transformations of state (Chatelard, 2012). This project investigates experiences of those who lived through its most recent phase: mass displacement which took place in the aftermath of occupation in 2003 and the transformations of state initiated by it. The scale of displacement since 2003 has been huge. The International Organization for Migration estimates that 1.6 million Iraqis have been displaced internally since February 2006 (IOM, 2011). The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) puts the figure close to 1.2 million (UNHCR, 2012:147). The official Syrian government figure for the number of Iraqis in Syria in January 2012 was 1 million (UNHCR, 2012: 154). While doubts have been raised about the reliability of figures provided by the Syrian government, there are still 100,000 Iraqis registered with UNHCR in Syria (*ibid.*) and the agency reported that 260,000 had registered with it between 2003 and 2010 (UNHCR, 2010). It was among refugees in Syria that I conducted this research.

This is an interdisciplinary project: I have mobilised insights from Refugee Studies, Narrative Studies, Oral History, Ancient and Contemporary Moral Philosophy, and Development Economics. I hope that the findings will be of interest to scholars in those fields, in Middle Eastern studies, in the Sociology of Conflict, and to policy-makers responding to displacement. The displaced are treated as social agents with lived experiences throughout this project. The research questions explore how Iraqis made momentous decisions to leave places of origin, who was involved in such choices, and how they addressed extremes of constraint associated with the violence and conflict which followed the invasion of Iraq in

2003. I propose that displacement can be better understood by examining decision making. Displacement is a process (Marfleet, 2011b) which deserves closer analysis. I hope to shed light on how people are actually forced into a decision to move by an accumulation of constraints. I connect these processes to wider political and historical developments. I address a number of key research questions.

- What pressures and influences were most significant in convincing Iraqis to leave their homes?
- To what extent did key networks and communities of kinship, diaspora, sect, and profession play a role in decisions?
- To what extent were migratory decisions informed by the dynamics of cumulative causation?
- What do migrants' experiences tell us about the relationship between state transformation and displacement?

I have developed a specific conceptual framework for addressing constraint in the context of migration drawing on experience at the individual level. I have not limited my understanding of coercion to the narrow “fear of persecution” remit of the 1951 UNHCR convention. I explore coercion and threat in a broader context. I use insights from Moral Philosophy to address issues of agency and compulsion (Aristotle, 350BCE; Wertheimer, 1987), arguing that threats which can induce migration need to be understood in light of their context and the interpretation of those who perceive them. Their perceptions of threat are altered by evolving contexts and amplified by the aggregation of threatening experiences. At the same time I argue that migration, even under duress, is part of a calculated threat-evasion strategy. My research also looks at the theory of cumulative causation (Massey, 1990) in relation to forced migration. I also assess the ways in which displacement alters contexts in which subsequent journeys are made, often coercing those who remain into taking flight. I further assess the relationship between displacement and transformations of state and contextualise these processes comparatively and historically.

My project addresses developments in Iraq after 2003 and following 13 years of sanctions and the reconstitution of the Iraqi state in the years which followed. Iraqi society – particularly in Baghdad - was re-shaped and communally “un-mixed” in the aftermath of sectarian civil conflict (Marfleet, 2007, 2009). These changes affected individuals and groups in different

ways. Social class affects the evasion strategies available to agents but is not an explicit feature of this study about decision making and coercion. I refer to the material resources available to my informants when the effects on choice are salient.

My interest in displacement in Iraq derives in part from my heritage. I was born in Iraq but came to the UK, now my country of nationality, aged four. My family has been affected by displacement and I am aware of its multiple and undocumented effects. The study of forced migration is “affected by a partisanship ... that cries out for moral positioning” because of the nature of the subject: suffering and dispossession call out to be recognised and their effects ameliorated (Chatty, 2010: 1). I make no claims to objectivity here nor do I aim to record and remedy suffering. Rather, in addition to making conceptual advances in the field, I wish to humanise the study of this period of Iraq's history by putting the people who have lived through it at its centre. My study offers a contrasting representation of refugees - not as the passive victims found in dominant British media representations (Kushner, 2006: 44) but as people with agency and individuality. I have also situated their experiences in broader political and historical processes. Here I have benefited from being anchored dually in Britain and Iraq - neither a complete insider nor an outsider. I was able to build relationships with many Iraqis in Syria, helped by my fluency in the distinctive Iraqi dialect of Arabic, but I have also attempted to retain sufficient distance for critical analysis.

Organisation of the thesis

In Chapter 1 I outline my research questions and present the framework that I use to conceptualise forced migration decisions as coerced choices. I review different categories of forced migration and argue that they are all threat-induced journeys and that therefore it is necessary to consider threat and coercion more closely. I have relied on insights from moral philosophy, notably from Alan Wertheimer (1987) but also from Aristotle, to address what constitutes voluntary and involuntary action, or more precisely forced action. I argue throughout the thesis that it is not only individuals who issue threats but also the broader circumstances of an agent's environment. Changes to these, such as those caused by transformations of state, can also be regarded as threatening. These are coercive circumstances in which reference groups, as well as individuals, can sense a threat to a baseline. The example I use in Chapter 1 is that of displacements relating to statecraft (Soguk, 1999) and to transformations of state more generally. I compare the purging of members of the former Ba'athist regime in Iraq - and those perceived to be associated with it (rightly or wrongly) – with similar historical processes. Some faced threats to their survival and others

to their livelihoods. Here I use the concept of “instrumental freedoms” (Sen, 1999) to develop the notion of baselines. I also consider cumulative causation (Massey, 1990) in a forced migration context and how departures affect those who stay, altering the context in which they remain and in which migration decisions were made.

In Chapter 2 I discuss methodological issues. I outline some conceptual issues in narrative and memory work, acknowledging the complex and fluid nature of memories from which people tell stories about their past and present. I also reflect on how contextual elements may have influenced the research. My case studies are based on a selection from 30 interviews I conducted during 2010 and 2011 in Damascus, Syria. I asked Iraqis what their lives were like before and during the occupation; about their perceptions of threat before flight; if/ how consultations affected decision-making; which individuals/groups were most influential; and how decisions to leave affected those who remained. I used narrative methods to elicit detailed testimony and to reflect upon events which influenced decisions to leave.

Chapter 3 provides a historical context to mass displacement in Iraq after the occupation of 2003. It begins in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution and a background to the eight year long Iran-Iraq war. The war ended in 1988 at enormous human and material cost to both countries. An international coalition inflicted a catastrophic defeat on Iraq in 1991, decimating its infrastructure. Sanctions then impoverished much of Iraqi society. The crushing defeat of 1991 also led to uprisings in the southern provinces and northern provinces of the country which were brutally suppressed. I discuss how the regime chose to interpret the uprisings from a communalist perspective and how sectarian cleavages emerged in the 1990s. I also show how exiled politicians and invading armies pursued sectarian agendas with disastrous consequences for Iraqi society. The result was a situation of generalised violence, sectarian killings and other criminal activities and the descent into a “state of violence” (Harling, 2011). It was in this context that further mass displacement took place.

In Chapter 4 I present the first stories of displacement. I focus on state collapse and state transformation, examining their effects on Iraqis, particularly those who were directly targeted by the nascent Iraqi state which emerged after 2003. I look at the displacements caused directly by threats from the occupation forces, drawing on stories of those who were purged because they were seen to belong to the old order. The chapter also considers experiences of

the Palestinian refugees living in Iraq and of the Mandaean – an ancient monotheistic sect. I also present the narratives of Iraqis who made temporary pre-invasion migrations to provincial locations where relatives lived. This was because they anticipated threats to their lives from the intense bombing campaign in 2003.

Chapter 5 examines how changed perceptions of space played a role in the displacement process. I show how state transformations manifested themselves as threatening alterations of social relations in key spaces in Iraqis' daily lives. I show how threats materialised in the school space, in the neighbourhood space, and in the work space in ways that disrupted social opportunities and economic freedoms, and which threatened lives. Stories in this chapter convey the cumulative nature of the displacement process. Agents were confronted with coercive proposals in a multiplicity of spaces in their daily lives: I call this situation a coercive landscape - one that is highly conducive to forced migration and mass displacement. This chapter also contains narratives of people who understood that leaving Iraq entailed economic insecurity which they were not willing to risk, and against which they did not have the financial means to cushion: they were “involuntarily immobilised” - they were unable to migrate - and displaced in place (Lubkemann, 2008). Their stories show how the dynamics of cumulative causation can constrain as well as compel migration. The phenomenon of “socially fortuitous wartime migration” (ibid.) is also acknowledged in this chapter.

Chapter 6 completes the stories of two Mandaean men and a Palestinian refugee who I introduced in Chapter 4. The aim is to show how members of Iraq's minorities experienced the transformations taking place in particular ways. Although they endured many of the same threats as the majority of their compatriots, I show how they encountered other types of threat specific to their minority groups. I exhibit these stories in a longitudinal way to give a more vivid sense of the cumulative nature of the displacement process. The ways in which the pressures accumulated and the coercive landscape came into being are features of this chapter – so too are the ways that threats and constraints are understood collectively by a reference group. The general climate of insecurity restricted freedoms to generate income – making Mandaean traders of precious metals into easy targets for criminal gangs. But it also restricted the freedom to practice their religious rituals which are key to maintaining their faith and group identity.

Chapter 7 is a concluding discussion which re-examines conceptual issues and summarises key findings about the decision making process, including observations about cumulative causation and the gendered nature of displacement. I reflect on the benefits of analysing forced migration using the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1. I conclude that in the Refugee Studies and Migration Studies field we need to think in new ways about the nature of constraint. I have found it helpful to think about migrant decision making in the context of what I call coercive landscapes. It is in such situations that people are compelled to make hard choice decisions but continue to express their agency as social actors. I suggest that the notion of coercive landscapes is a useful conceptual tool with which to interrogate mass displacements of the past, present, and future in different geographical contexts of displacement. I also reassert the importance of the historical perspective in studying displacements and its relationship to state transformation.

Whilst in Damascus I took many photographs and have included a selection in the thesis. I have also included photographs from a visit I made to Iraq in the summer of 2001. There are other images which an Iraqi friend took during a trip there this year and which she has kindly allowed me to use here. The images are not intended as data but serve to give the reader a sense of the world which the author and participants inhabited.

Chapter 1

Coercion: the missing concept

... with respect to cases of throwing goods overboard in a storm: abstractedly no man throws away his property willingly, but with a view to his own and his shipmates' safety, anyone would who had any sense.

- Aristotle (350 BCE, NE iii: 54)

Coerced choices are not unwilled, but they are, it may be said, *against* one's will.

- Alan Wertheimer (1987: 302)

In this chapter I outline my understanding of what forced migration is, addressing directly what it means to be *forced* into a decision to migrate, using insights from moral philosophy and development economics. This is an under-researched area. Although the concept of forced migration is widely used, it is taken for granted and few scholars have dealt with it directly. I argue that a forced migration is a decision taken to relocate under circumstances of duress, induced by the decision maker's perception of threat. These decisions typically occur after a process of displacement involving a series of episodes of increasing constraint on a person's ability to live in a way that he or she deems valuable, possibly culminating in a threat to personal safety. Threats may also be seen as challenging the capacity to live in a way that is worthwhile.

Displacement is often experienced as *a process* (Marfleet, 2011b: 281): a series of complex episodes in which threats and pressures accumulate until individuals, families, and even

communities are compelled to take evasive measures that may lead to physical relocation in search of security (ibid.). It is in effect a package of losses, including loss of social and economic resources and legal and political rights - but one which should not always be conflated with forced migration (Lubkemann, 2008: 454-455). Forced migration can often occur as part of this process of displacement but not all who wish to move after experiencing displacement are able to do so. They may not have the resources to do so, or they may be prevented from moving by actors and factors beyond their control. In effect, they are *forcibly immobilized*: rather than forced to migrate, they are forced to remain in a situation in which they have experienced losses - therefore they become *displaced in place* (ibid.). While many suffer losses as a result of forced migration, a few can benefit. A decision to leave, even if forced, can be socially empowering and result in socially fortuitous wartime migration (ibid.).¹

The displaced are not objects but *subjects* with specific lived experiences. They are affected by forces that fundamentally alter their circumstances. Like all human beings they are social agents whose lives are constrained by structural factors. Within these constraints they seek to make choices and act upon them in order to change their circumstances. They may face constraints that are overwhelming and a range of choices which is minimal (Marfleet, 2006: 193-4). By considering refugees as human agents, the constraints upon them and their available options can be better examined. Our understanding of the lived experience of displacement can be enhanced by treating Iraqis as social agents who have used migration as part of a calculated survival strategy. Many have been compelled to construct and act upon these strategies because of the political upheavals and crises confronting them since the 2003 occupation which compounded the pressures of dealing with international sanctions and dictatorship. Further constraints have been imposed upon Iraqi society, limiting the choices that individuals and groups have in their everyday lives.

Invasion and occupation of Iraq led to colossal changes in the country. Castles (2010) has written about “social transformations” that can drive displacement. He speaks of “step changes” which are “closely linked to major shifts in dominant economic, political, and strategic relationships” (Castles, 2010: 12). They do not occur gradually as part of a process

1

Those able to make socially fortuitous wartime migration were in the minority in this study and the fortuitous nature of their migration was limited but worthy of note. See chapter 5.

in manageable increments. They are “fundamental shifts” that put “all existing social patterns” into question with many being reconfigured (ibid.). Social transformations, however fundamental, typically retain elements of the reality that preceded them. Invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in significant changes, though there were continuities with the recent past, as I explain in Chapter 3. The invasion exacerbated developments of the 1990s and formalised communal politics. Mass displacement ensued as a result of communal violence and radical post-occupation policies. I say more about these issues later in this and in subsequent chapters.

Research questions

In order to understand forced migration as a lived experience, I focus on the decision making process which preceded migration journeys. I explore how these decisions were made and the effects of change on the choices and constraints presented to individuals (and sometimes also to groups) before leaving Iraq. The key research questions that I address in this study are:

- What pressures and influences were most significant in convincing Iraqis to leave their homes?
- To what extent did key networks and communities of kinship, diaspora, sect, and profession play a role in decisions?
- To what extent were migratory decisions informed by the dynamics of cumulative causation?
- What do their experiences tell us about the relationship between state transformation and displacement?

I begin this chapter with a critical assessment of Moore and Shellman's (2004) rational choice theory approach to understanding forced migration as it is the only published study which specifically addresses decision making in forced migration contexts. I discuss the limitations of the statistical political science approach they use and address matters of agency, calculation and threats. Moore and Shellman also touch upon notions of cultural community and of cumulative causation in migration (Massey, 1990). These are concepts I address more fully later in the chapter.

What constitutes voluntary and forced actions - and what is meant by coercion? I consider these issues using Aristotle's moral philosophy and Wertheimer's (1987) framework for a theory of coercion. I explain why migration - even when undertaken after extensive planning and not after receiving a direct or personal physical threat - should be seen as a choice made under duress. Threats, as I show, manifest themselves in many different ways, and compel migration accordingly. I present various categories of forced migrant and argue that their common characteristic is the experience of threat.

Decisions and datasets: "Fear of persecution"

Forced migration and decision making have been addressed in key articles by Moore and Shellman (2004, 2007). They define a forced migrant as "one who, owing to a fear of persecution, has abandoned his or her dwelling in favour of relocating elsewhere, whether within or beyond the borders of his or her country of residence" (Moore & Shellman, 2004:724). They build upon Davenport, Moore and Poe's approach, seeing migration decisions as choices and - importantly - address individual humans making decisions to leave (Moore & Shellman, 2004: 724-5). They see refugee flows as an observable aggregate of constrained individual choice, adding that "few (if any) refugees actually had no other option: they could have stayed and risked imprisonment or martyrdom" (Moore & Shellman 2007: 814).

The persecution they speak of refers to people's fear for their liberty, physical safety, or lives. Here, threats emanate from the behaviour of groups of people competing for political power. Moore and Shellman (2004: 725-6) themselves contend that people will monitor these threats – which can come from foreign, government, and dissident armed forces - before making migration choices. People will leave home when the probability of suffering persecution becomes high enough to make the expected utility of leaving higher than that of staying. There is supporting evidence for these ideas. In a study by Al-Khalidi and others (2007: 1), Iraqis gave numerous reasons for leaving, often as a direct result of violence - mostly sectarian violence but also fighting between insurgents and the Multinational Forces allied with the Iraqi military. But the range of reasons given for leaving Iraq was broad. In a survey they conducted, 19 per cent of those questioned blamed the "bad situation in general" for their departure (Al-Khalidi et al, 2007: 46). This suggests that Moore and Shellman's approach is

useful but too narrow.

Moore and Shellman (2004: 726-9) observe that people live in cultural communities based on familial ties, language, religious practices and traditions that are critically important to them. They refer to Douglas Massey's (1990) ideas of cumulative causation noting that initially migrants form networks that facilitate new journeys from origin countries. A cumulative increase in the flow of migration occurs, inducing additional journeys until the migration system has a dynamic of its own, affecting both countries of origin and destination. As more and more people leave their homes, a person's cultural community begins to break down until eventually the cost of remaining increases. Moore & Shellman (2004: 742) touch on these ideas - about which I speak later in the chapter - but conclude that the primary determinants of forced migration are violent behaviour of governments and dissidents (and their interaction).

Conceptualising refugees as social agents monitoring threats is important. Moore and Shellman's studies are statistical and based upon "standard rationalist kinds of assumptions" (2004: 726). They assume that people are "purposive", acting with conscious intention to protect their "liberty, physical person, and life" (2007: 814). These are reasonable assumptions: when a threshold threat value is reached rational individuals will decide to migrate. However, in a displacement crisis, what is meant by a rational individual? Moore and Shellman's studies are also focused at the level of the nation-state. Their interest is thus in publicly observable actions that large groups of people find threatening (Moore & Shellman, 2004: 727). What of less visible or covert actions such as the threatening private communications received by so many? These can take the form of simple hand written notes, telephone calls, or cryptic verbal messages delivered in face to face encounters.

To measure threat levels in potential refugee producing countries Moore and Shellman make use of quantitative datasets. To measure the likelihood of violation of a person's physical integrity by the state they present a political terror scale, ordered from one to five, where five represents the highest chance of violation (Gibney and Dalton, 1996, cited in Moore and Shellman, 2004: 730). Dissident threat is measured with Banks's cross-time archive data set which records the number of times dissidents used violence in each year in specific states (Banks, 2002, cited in Moore and Shellman, 2004: 730). These violent acts have an impact - but what of people's subjective perceptions of exemplary violent actions? In early April 2008

Youssef Adel, a Christian priest, was killed in a drive-by shooting in Baghdad by unknown gunmen (A.P., 2008). His murder cannot be understood properly as a statistic: there were significant effects on his congregation and for Iraqi Christians generally that cannot be verified through statistics.

Here we need an approach that recognises a broader range of threats and their subjective impacts. While statistics are an important part of the study of displacement in terms of measuring size and scope, data sets cannot teach us about deeper meanings behind threats, fears and decisions.

Pushing and harming

Everett Lee (1966) cautioned against using a simple calculus to explain a process that was about inexact perceptions. Although Lee was writing nearly 50 years ago, his comment is as valid today as it was to the time in which he made it. He conceptualised migration decisions and processes as involving four interlinked sets of factors: those at the origin and destination, intervening obstacles between the two, and personal factors (Lee, 1966: 50).² The decision maker may be indifferent to some factors in the places of destination and origin and view other factors as positives which would be attractive factors, or negatives which would be repellent factors. Obstacles would also affect people differently in their decisions (Lee, 1966: 50-51). But the most crucial element was the *perception* of these factors which were influenced by personal sensitivities and other individual character traits (Lee, 1966: 51). He also suggested that people would be reluctant to move from their familiar surroundings as their knowledge of origin areas was more accurate and reliable than of a new location. Moving was thus associated with uncertainty so the factors in favour of migration would have to substantially outweigh those against it (Lee, 1966: 50-51). Lee also acknowledged that not everyone who migrated took the decision themselves as “children are carried along by their parents” and “wives accompany their husbands even though it tears them away from environments they love” (ibid.). Parnwell (1993: 77-78) argues that although Lee's model was highly generalised it did point to the need to be mindful about prevailing circumstances in areas of origin and factors that help and hinder their movement. In other words, the circumstances and constraints of individuals need to be analysed to understand their decisions

² Lee used this framework to formulate a series of hypotheses about migration, such as its volume under varying conditions, which are not relevant to this study of decision making. See Lee (1966).

to migrate. These points are equally valid in the study of displacement.

Parnwell (1993: 78) set out to do this himself, though his work centred on push and pull factors relating to population movements in the developing world, especially between the countryside and the city in relation to economic development processes. When he does briefly detour to look at forced migration, he acknowledges that certain forms of movement give the appearance of being a result of free choice. In reality though, the circumstances facing the migrant may well have been the choice “between survival and starvation”. To address this he uses an adaptation of Petersen's 1958 typology of migration and proposes a category of impelled migration in which “the mover retains a modicum of power to decide whether or not to leave”. For Parnwell (1993: 24-5), people fleeing from political persecution may fall into this category:

The fact that people have different levels of tolerance of, or are affected to different degrees by, political persecution determines that some people decide sooner than others that it would be in their best interests to leave. Similarly, different people give different weight to the advantages of moving to a new place set against the disadvantages of leaving their home areas.

Harm induced migration

A different approach to migration and decision making looks at harm rather than danger. Penz (2002: 10-11) argues that harm-induced migration, though it can overlap with forced migration, should be distinguished from it as in some cases it may not be deemed to be forced. The example he gives is where a development project or policy significantly disrupts someone's livelihood. Living standards are lowered, but still “viable” (ibid.). The person then decides to move elsewhere with his family. Penz argues it is more appropriate to say that the family moved because it was *harmed* rather than *forced*. He includes this category in his analysis of displacement and recognises that where harm ends and force begins will be an issue of controversy (ibid.). One can ask what a “viable” living standard is, for whom it is viable, but only answer it with reference to context and circumstances. This is an issue which I discuss later with reference to Amartya Sen (1999).

Returning again to Parnwell we see another category of involuntary population movement in the case of resettlement, though the degree of involuntariness may vary. When occurring to make way for major infrastructural projects it involves “the enforced and permanent movement of people from one site to another, to which there is no practical alternative” (Parnwell, 1993: 44). Land settlement schemes may involve resettlement but with some degree of volition on the part of the mover.³ He also says that in most cases “resettlement is a form of involuntary population movement because, given the choice, the movers would generally have preferred to stay put” (ibid.). Parnwell touches on the absence of choice but does not develop the point. His focus is on migration related to economic development projects. He mentions involuntary migration in relation to major infrastructural projects, but what of involuntary movements related to major *political* projects? Parnwell does not deal with these interlinked factors in depth but they are developments that need to be understood in relation to displacement in Iraq.

Displacement and Statecraft

It is the aim of some political projects to prompt human displacement. Political movements or state authorities that wish to seize strategic resources, or are committed to exclusivist claims on territory, have often assaulted local populations in order to make resources available for commercial exploitation or to achieve “cleansing”. Less obvious as a driver of displacement is “statecraft” – the “craft” of state building. For centuries those engaged in the exercise of authority within nation states, or those who wish to enjoy such authority, have developed strategies associated with mass displacement. This is especially clear in periods when nation states are under construction, or during periods of instability, reorganization or reconstruction of the state. Such developments have been common in the Middle East. Repeated episodes of displacement have taken place over the past 150 years, related to imperial policies, colonial encounters and, in the mid-twentieth century, to struggles for national independence (Chatty 2010). In the case of Iraq they are evident from the first years of the British Mandate and have been a feature of modern Iraqi history (Chatelard 2011; Marfleet 2011). When a new order began taking shape after the invasion and occupation of 2003 a series of displacements began, which eventually became a mass exodus.

Changes involved in the construction or the reconfiguration of a nation state may entail

³ Presumably because in some cases people are compensated for being moved from the land.

abolition of an old regime. Zolberg (1983: 30–31) comments that during the course of these events “entire social strata may come to be viewed as obstacles”. This process typically entails “successive refoundings... each of which may result in a refugee-generating crisis” (Zolberg 1983: 30–31). In European history human displacement has been instrumental in the transformations of the absolutist state to a centralising modern state, and from that form of state to the centralising national state (Soguk, 1999: 67). The displacement of some 200,000 Huguenots from France after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685 was an attempt by the French state to homogenise the religious affiliation of its population (Soguk, 1999: 70-71). The Huguenots were Protestants in a Catholic state. Shortly after seizing power its Catholic king Louis XXIV “set out to eliminate Calvinism from France. This undertaking makes sense only in regard to absolutist ideology, as an effort by the king to achieve what he conceived to be a perfectly unified polity” (Zolberg et al, 1989: 5). Jacobson links the expulsion of religious minorities by monarchies in Europe at the time to the development of a *protonationalism*, instilling an identification with embryonic nationalities (Jacobson, 1996: 20, cited in Soguk, 1999: 71). The Huguenot displacement could be seen as intrinsic to a practice of statecraft in which the absolutist state evolved into a modern centralising one. The Huguenot episode was an early conceptualisation of territory as a bounded exclusionary space within which the “realities” of the state and its population were to become possible. The territorial state would mobilise resources of the territory in a more contained and controlled way. The territory would become identifiable and uncontested as a political location. The realignment of power, place, and population would be used to reaffirm it (Soguk, 1999: 71-72).

Later the French Revolution produced displacements that were symptomatic of statecraft. The revolution did not create something out of nothing. What it did do was reorganise political space for the expression of a range of existing and evolving sentiments of collectivity (Finer, 1997, in Soguk, 1999: 74). Power was re-aligned under the new rubrics of the nation-state and nation-citizen. These were new forms of eligibility – in the sense of being eligible to be a nation-citizen and to any rights the citizen may be entitled to - which could not have been defined without the simultaneous creation of forms of ineligibility (Soguk, 1999:74). Brubaker (1992: 46-7) argues that:

By inventing the national citizen and the legally homogeneous national citizenry, the

revolution simultaneously invented the foreigner. Henceforth citizen and foreigner would be correlative, mutually exclusive, exhaustive categories. One would be either a citizen or a foreigner, there would be no third way.

To craft and empower the notions of national citizen, new forms of foreignness also had to be constructed. Thousands were displaced after the revolution but this was part and parcel of the process of inventing the nation-state. The new France cast out those falling victim to the readjustments that produced the new category of “foreigner”. There were several great exoduses in the 26 years after the revolution. Earliest amongst them were Aristocrats and the gentry, as well as the squirearchy, *petite noblesse*, and ordinary people. Later, refractory priests and aristocratic remnants took flight and thousands more went into exile after the failure of the counter-revolution (Soguk, 1999: 75-76). What they all had in common was their relationship to the old order. The new order saw them as problematic, a threat, real or otherwise, to the viability of the new national and republican political project.

There have been many similar episodes in history. Carr (2009) has written of King Philip III of Spain's expulsion of some 350,000 Moriscos between 1609 and 1614. They were Muslims who had forcibly been baptised as Catholics and were forcibly deported. Their removal was part of a process beginning with the forced conversion of the Jews from 1391-1412 during which time Spain's rulers “ruthlessly dismantled” the diverse Iberian society of the Middle Ages and “imposed a single homogeneous Catholic identity on all their subjects” (Carr, 2009: 293). After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in the aftermath of World War I, around 3 million ethnic Hungarians suddenly found that they were minorities in the new nation states of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia (Brubaker, 1995: 195-196). The migration of ethnic Hungarians to Hungary was limited in scope in comparison to the flight of Balkan Turkish and Muslim populations after World War I as, observes Brubaker (1995: 196), it was primarily an upper and middle class migration: “First to flee were those most closely identified with the repressive and exploitative aspects of Hungarian rule – and therefore those with the most to fear from a new regime”. This group included great landowners and state officials connected to the courts and police. Many of them fled before the new regimes consolidated their rule. Next to leave were middle class Hungarians who suffered from “economic displacement and loss of social status” as a result of the “de-Magyarization of public administration, state employment and education” (Brubaker, 1995: 196).

Similar processes of adjustment and re-alignment were imposed upon state and society in Iraq after 2003. An example is the processes of de-Ba'athification. For decades before the invasion Iraq had been a one party state. The Ba'ath party was the ruling and only legal party in Iraq. Membership was crucial to an individual's career chances with the country's biggest employer: the state. In 2003, vast numbers of Iraqis deemed to belong to the old order were instantly marginalised from the “new” Iraq. As part of de-Ba'athification measures, United States officials disbanded the armed forces and rendered some 350,000 people jobless without compensation (Marfleet, 2007: 405). Paul Bremer, the chairman of the Coalition Provisional Authority, (Iraq's (in)effective ruler at the time), later reversed the decree. Attempts to pay thousands of former soldiers were ineffective. “In addition, the four top layers of the Ba’ath party hierarchy, comprising some 30,000 people, were removed from state institutions” (ibid.). Not only were whole communities excluded from jobs in the new political order, but they were actively targeted by it.

... the CPA approved a wholesale assault on academic and professional networks. In effect it declared open season on professors, medical doctors, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, writers, artists – the “old” intelligentsia. They were guilty by association for having worked within the apparatus of state, for having remained in Iraq through the years of sanctions and hardship, and for not having become exiles. Most important, they were deemed to be people of influence who did not have a place within the new order and who could be targeted with impunity. As a result the Iraqi diaspora, like many others before it, soon contained unprecedented numbers of the country’s intellectuals, “looted” like their libraries, offices, classrooms, studios and laboratories. Had they too become objects of contemporary statecraft – marginalised and excluded during reconstruction of the nation-state? (Marfleet, 2009).

Such a big question cannot be answered within the scope of this project. However, aspects of the interlinked processes of statecraft and displacement, integral to the re-formation of the Iraqi state along communal and ethno-sectarian lines are observable at the individual level and I hope to shed light upon them.

So far, I have surveyed different types of forced migration. I have looked briefly at journeys

in which individuals make calculations before they migrate from the threat of persecution from different armed groups. I have noted that the breakdown of a person's cultural community can exert pressure to leave on those who remain. I also remarked that some people have time to prepare and plan for their journeys while others must leave in a rushed way. Major infrastructural projects also result in enforced population resettlement, and land settlement schemes may have the same result but with a different level of volition (though not likely control) on the part of the displaced. I also discussed the relationship between displacement and nation-state transformations. I also noted that there is a worthwhile, if blurred and controversial, distinction between forced migration and harm induced migration (Penz, 2002): a drop in living standards caused by a development project can be seen as a harm that induces migration decisions. There is an array of circumstances that can lead people to leave their homes and this is only a small selection. What they all share though is an element of coercion: their common characteristic is the experience of threat. What is meant by coercion and compulsion? What actions can we say are forced?

Reactive migration

Richmond (1994) contends that “the distinction between movements of population that are voluntary and involuntary, or forced and free, is of doubtful validity” because all human actions are constrained (Richmond, 1994: 48). The distinction, he states, is “misleading”; he argues that migratory decisions made “under conditions of extreme stress, do not differ from other kinds of decision-governing social behaviour” (Richmond, 1994: 55). Instead he offers the notion that all migrations can be placed on a continuum of proactive and reactive migration according to the level of autonomy exhibited by the actors involved (1994: 58). Proactive migrants, he says, have relatively unconstrained choice and can choose if and where to go, when, and with whom. Reactive migrants, like victims of external wars and natural disasters are more constrained in their actions and are “reacting to circumstances almost entirely beyond their control” (Richmond, 1994: 58-59). He classifies UN Convention refugees, forced labourers, slaves and stateless persons as clear examples of reactive migrants (Richmond, 1994: 61) but emphasises that there is a continuum between the reactive and proactive extremes and that a large proportion of people who migrate, crossing state borders or not, combine characteristics of both ends of the continuum (ibid.). They may be responding to pressures beyond their control, reacting to circumstances by exercising a limited degree of

choice in their movements (ibid.).

Richmond (1994: 67-70) also produced a typology of 25 reactive migrations that had a combination of political, economic, environmental, social, and biopsychological factors as their main determinants and provided a brief explanation of each type. Despite his disinterest in the distinction between forced and unforced decisions and actions, he uses terms relating to force, coercion and threats throughout the descriptions of the migration types. For example there are “persons forced to migrate” he says because of economic collapse; migration may be induced by “a threat to life-style”; migration may be “impelled” by laws that enforce discrimination; and maybe in “escape from general deprivation of human rights” (ibid.). But if these circumstances are not of the choosing of those who decide to leave, and as he says, are a result of pressures beyond their control, are they not therefore options *forced* upon decision makers? He remarks that:

Although refugee movements are usually represented as “forced”, they are only an extreme case of the constraints that are placed upon the choices available to an individual in particular circumstances. ... Choices facing an ethnic or political minority may be to join a dissident army, face political imprisonment, torture or death. ... the limited options available involve excruciating choices. Flight is one of these. (Richmond, 1994: 53)

However, as I explain more fully in the following pages, when the only choices available to a person are excruciating ones resulting from pressures beyond her control, then decisions made under such conditions can correctly be understood as *forced* decisions. While a person may willingly take an action from a limited set of excruciating choices, her being confined to those choices is not willed (Wertheimer, 1987: 301-302). I suggest that Richmond's reactive migration typology also falls under the rubric of threat-induced migration. Richmond is right to say that refugees make decisions to move in circumstances of extreme constraint. But I also believe it is necessary to take the issue further and explain the process through which threats coerce refugees into making such decisions. An explanation of what constitutes a coerced decision is crucial to understanding experiences of displacement and now I consider this using ideas from moral philosophy.

Agency and compulsion

As long ago as 350BCE human agency was a matter for philosophical consideration. Individuals were seen as agents whether on board a sinking ship or under the threat of a base despot. Aristotle was trying to understand the nature of human actions and the deliberations which precede complex decisions under threat. In book three of the *Nichomachean Ethics* (NE iii) he referred to voluntary acts and involuntary acts, to acts taken under compulsion, to consultations, as well as to responsibility. His thoughts are relevant to understanding choices made by Iraqis under compulsion and the deliberations and consultations intrinsic to them. The point of departure is that for many Iraqis the aftermath of the invasion has been a time of crisis. Migration was a choice made after deliberations and possibly consultations, under compulsion and within severe constraints.

Whether or not certain choices *ought* to have been made or were justifiable even under compulsion is not a concern of this study. Migration can be a complicated moral choice because individual or family safety may be at stake, as can be the fate of others left behind. I am interested in the causative events building up to displacement and migration and how these events influenced people's decisions. But these are events over which most displaced Iraqis had no control and for which they cannot be held responsible.

Compulsion and “mixed” actions

Aristotle's consideration of the involuntary nature of actions is useful here. His understanding of clear cut compulsory actions is that they are those where the origination is external to the agent. The agent contributes nothing, says Aristotle, as if being carried away by a wind or as though men had power over his person (NE iii 1:53). But actions can be “mixed” in nature (NE iii 1:54). Even in severely constrained circumstances certain actions taken under compulsion are more like voluntary acts for Aristotle because they are physically undertaken by the agent. Many journeys made by Iraqis after 2003 will have been actions of a “mixed kind”. These kinds of action are done:

... from fear of greater evils, or from some honourable motive, as, for instance, if you were ordered to commit some base act by a despot who had your parents or children in his power, and they were to be saved upon your compliance or die upon your refusal ...

(Aristotle, NE iii 1:53)

A man may throw goods overboard in a storm to prevent a ship from sinking. That would be a “mixed kind” of action and “choiceworthy” at the time of its doing (Aristotle, NE iii 1:54). The man was the originator of the motion of his limbs, and with himself being the origin of the action, “it rests with himself to do or not to do” (ibid.). The ends and objectives of these actions need to be understood with reference to the actual occasion. “Such actions then are voluntary, though in the abstract perhaps involuntary because no one would choose any of such things in and by itself” (ibid.). We know that many Iraqis have left their homes for fear of being killed. In some cases they have been directly and credibly threatened with such things (Al Khalidi et al, 2007: 16-17). They have not been literally forced into taking each step of the journey, such as packing up their belongings, in chains or at gunpoint. We may assume however that they would not otherwise do such things *in and by themselves*.

But some ambivalence remains with this definition of voluntary-like actions taken under compulsion. Is it enough for our understanding of the experience of forced migration to say that it is voluntary in “real” terms but only abstractedly involuntary because it was performed under compulsion? Wertheimer (1987: 301-302) explains the ambivalence. Aristotle understands actions as being more like voluntary ones in their nature when the agent is the source of the movement. The involuntary nature lies in the abstract because, writes Aristotle (NE iii: 53), the origination of the act was not, properly speaking, external to the agent. Wertheimer (1987: 301-302) notes J. L. Mackie's similar observation that while an action taken within a coercive choice situation is voluntary, the agent's “being confined to just these alternatives was not voluntary”. Reformulating the common points of Aristotle and Mackie, he asserts that:

one acts involuntarily when one must choose between alternatives that are contrary to the range of alternatives one's moral will would permit. One does not act involuntarily merely because one does not *like* the available alternatives. For, as we have seen, reluctance and voluntariness can well go hand in hand. One acts involuntarily because one has a deep aversion to having to choose in response to immoral proposals. Coerced choices are not unwilling, but they are, it may be said, *against* one's will (Wertheimer, 1987: 302).

There is a relevant connection to forced migration in Iraq: Iraqis have had to act in response to immoral proposals which manifest themselves in many ways. They may be direct personal threats from militias or other armed groups. They may be conclusions reached after monitoring their surroundings to find themselves faced with an array of threats should they remain. Here there is a coercive proposal: abandon your home for an uncertain future to avoid these threats, or remain and accept the consequences for you and possibly your family.

Baselines: the contextual nature of coercion claims

Let us explore the nature of coercion and the idea that it is contextual by considering cases in which a person is making offers and/or threats to another (Wertheimer, 1987: 233). In the following examples, person A is making the proposals and/or threats and person B is receiving them. When person A's proposal to person B reduces B's options, it is uncontroversial to assume that B's freedom is being restricted. But options can only be decreased (or increased) when compared to a standard or baseline. Here I am interested in evaluating the options available to B as the person being threatened or not - therefore it is B's baseline that must be assumed in order to understand what B's options are (Wertheimer, 1987: 305-6).

What is the difference between a threat and an offer?

A makes a threat when, if B does *not* accept A's proposal, B will be worse off than in the relevant baseline position. ... A's proposal may, of course, include both a threat and an offer (what Michael Taylor calls a “throffer”): “If you do X, I'll give you a large reward; if you don't do X, I'll kill you.” (Wertheimer, 1987: 204)

Therefore a “throffer” is a threat as a person's refusal to accept it will leave her worse off than in the relevant baseline position. In simple cases, perhaps when A threatens to kill B if B does not do X (where X might be leaving the country), the baseline is clear: being alive. But the situation can be more complex. Robert Nozick's example of *The Drowning Case* illustrates this point.

A comes upon B, who is drowning. A proposes to rescue B if B agrees to pay him \$10,000.

A and B both know that there are no potential rescuers (Nozick, cited in Wertheimer, 1987: 207).

Can person B expect to be rescued, and without reward, based on the norms or the morals of their society? If the answer to the questions is yes, then person A's proposal can be interpreted as a threat, normatively and morally. If the answer to the questions is no, but B expects (even mistakenly) that A is morally and normatively obliged to rescue him, then B may *feel* that the proposal is a threat and not an offer (ibid.). These examples show the contextual and subjective nature of threats and coercion. The interpersonal cases presented can be applicable in cases where a person receives a personal threat. But rather than thinking purely in interpersonal terms we should apply these ideas to the wider environment. A can be read as the circumstances that face B. A can also be part of bigger structures and policies. The coercive proposal presented to B may also be thought of as one facing a group of people, not just an individual. The coercive proposals may be understood to have been presented, intentionally or otherwise, to a specific sect, kinship group, or perhaps even to a professional class. In some cases they may have been interpreted as a threat to the whole female gender. That is not to say that members of a group will necessarily interpret or act upon threats in the same way, but certain actions and developments have been aimed at specific groups in Iraqi society and designed with exemplary effects in mind.

Hard Choices

Some proposals are too unpalatable to accept. But if rejecting them means remaining in dire straits, then a person is faced with a hard choice situation and these situations are part of the coercion family, they are associated with “force”, “duress”, and “compulsion” (Wertheimer, 1987: 233). The important difference between hard choices and other choices is the “particularly severe constraining effect” they have. Joseph Raz has suggested that people do not act autonomously when they are struggling to maintain the “minimum conditions of a worthwhile life.”⁴ The relation between hard choices and autonomy is more complex than this:

⁴ “The more one's choices are dictated by personal needs, the less autonomous one becomes.” “Liberalism, Autonomy, and the Politics of Neutral Concern,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. VII, ed. Peter French et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 112. Cited in Wertheimer (1987: 233).

Although the *scope* of our hard choice options is limited by their unattractiveness, the choice *among* those options may be of especial *importance*. In the latter sense, making a hard choice may constitute an important and positive assertion of our autonomy. Nonetheless, just as the prospect of hanging is said to focus the mind, (very) hard choices produce too much focus and not enough scope. For that reason we can, I think, plausibly use the family of coercion terms to describe hard choice situations (Wertheimer, 1987: 233, emphasis in original).

Too much focus and not enough scope make for a hard choice from the family of coercion terms. In addition to “coercion” these terms are “duress”; “force”; and “compulsion”.⁵ (Wertheimer, 1987: 5-6). It is this concept of a hard choice, with its coercion nomenclature that we can learn about in forced migration decisions in the Iraqi context. Certainly the choice is of special importance: leaving one’s home is perhaps the biggest decision of many people's lives and their survival may be contingent upon it. We can also see how migration can be a means to avoid a situation of dire straits. Whether the situation is one of a hard choice, a coercive proposal or “thoffer”, an understanding of the threat must be accompanied by an understanding of the baseline.

Instrumental Freedoms

The perspective of “freedoms” from development and welfare economist Amartya Sen (1999) can help us to craft an understanding of what these baselines might be. Sen speaks of the importance of substantive human freedoms that development should be concerned with expanding (1999: 36). They include “elementary capabilities” like:

... being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, under-nourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedoms that are associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech and so on (ibid.).

The expansion of these elementary capabilities, or freedoms, is intrinsically important as a primary end of human development. The expansion of different types of freedoms should also

⁵ Wertheimer (1987: 5-6) uses these terms in a rough way without drawing important terminological distinctions between them, as I also do in this thesis.

be seen as instrumentally important to human development. Sen (1999: 37) argues that development itself should be seen as a process that enlarges human freedom, or capabilities, in general. In this context, different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to development in two principal ways: their expansion contributes to the expansion of human freedom more generally, and to the expansion of other interconnected instrumental freedoms.

There are five distinctive but not exhaustive groups of instrumental freedoms (Sen, 1999: 38-9). They impact directly and indirectly upon the freedom that people have to live in the way they would like to live, but also complement one another.

1) *Political freedoms*: People's opportunities to select their government in terms from a selection of parties, and under certain principles; their ability to criticise and scrutinise authorities; the freedom of political expression and an uncensored press. They include the entitlements associated, broadly speaking, with democracies. Examples include opportunities for political dialogue and dissent, as well as voting rights and participatory selection of legislators and executives.

2) *Economic facilities*: The opportunities given to individuals to make use of economic resources so as to consume, produce, or exchange, respectively. The conditions of exchange, relating to markets and relative prices, and the amount of land and resources owned, will determine economic entitlements. Increases in the wealth and income of a country will manifest themselves in enhancement of economic entitlements of individuals or families. However, this will be contingent upon how generated incomes are distributed. Economic entitlements of enterprises large and small will also depend upon availability and access to finance.

3) *Social opportunities*: An individual's ability to live better is closely related to the arrangements that society makes for healthcare, education and so on. They will allow a person to live longer and more healthily but also let that person participate more effectively in economic and political activities. A higher level of literacy will grant a person freedom to partake in more advanced economic activities. In the political sphere, being able to read a newspaper and communicate in writing with other political activists will enhance an individual's political freedom.

4) *Transparency guarantees*: They give people the freedom to operate on some sort of presumption of what they are being offered, and can expect to get, in their social interactions. Guarantees of operating under disclosure and lucidity create a sense of trust and openness key to preventing corruption, financial irresponsibility and underhand dealings.

5) *Protective security*: The presence of a social safety net to prevent the vulnerable from falling into abject destitution is essential, even in flourishing economic systems. Measures include fixed institutional arrangements like unemployment benefits and income supplements, and ad hoc arrangements such as the creation of emergency public employment or famine relief.

This framework allows poverty to be understood not just in terms of low incomes but as the deprivation of basic capabilities needed to lead a life that people have reason to value. Sen (1999: 86-7) acknowledges that lack of income can be the main reason for a person's capability deprivation, but it is seen as one of many different instrumental factors rather than as an intrinsic one. Income is not the *only* instrumental influence on capability generation. Finally, how income levels affect capabilities is contingent and conditional. The instrumental relationship between them varies between different communities, and even between different families and individuals (ibid.).

Sen's point of departure is one of encouraging the expansion of instrumental capabilities as a means and end of development. In understanding the determinants of mass displacement it must be understood that the deprivation of elementary capabilities among large numbers of people who once had them can create conditions for mass exit. In other words, policies enacted in Iraq by the occupation rulers after 2003 and the ensuing violence and crises have created just such conditions. They have put many people in worse positions economically and otherwise than they were in before, in relation to a baseline. I use this idea of freedoms as a broad framework to consider what a person's or group's baselines might be. To Sen's categories I add religious freedom - the freedom to practise one's faith without being harmed - as there is evidence to show that Iraq's religious minorities have experienced this type of constraint since 2003.

Cumulative causation and displacement

Despite a collapse in employment and income following the 2003 invasion, relatively few Iraqis left their homes for economic reasons and there was no immediate mass exodus. Marfleet (2007) observes that the patterns of flight from Iraq suggests cumulative causation. A study of Iraqi refugees in Syria (Al Khalidi et. al., 2007) shows that only 4% of those interviewed between March-April 2007 had arrived before 2004. A slow increase was followed by a huge rise during 2005 and 2006. By 2006 however, security had been undermined in the broadest sense to the point at which millions felt they had no alternative but to leave (Marfleet, 2007: 398). The February 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque, a holy Shia shrine in Samarra, had triggered “the beginning of reciprocal, retaliatory, sectarian violence which, in turn, has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis” (Al-Khalidi et al, 2007: 10).

In Iraq it is not only the violence itself that has been a determinant but its cumulative effects on the population at large which has seen the collapse of professional and other social networks. Kidnappings, assassinations, disappearances, and death squad killings targeted civilian members of communities deemed to be enemies. Iraq’s Christian community has been drastically affected: following assaults on churches in Baghdad in 2004, large numbers of Christians fled to the north before heading to Syria. Cumulative causation took its effect: “as people departed, members of their families, communities and other networks were profoundly affected. In the case of Christians, by 2006, communities in areas of Baghdad such as Karada and Doura were said to be fast disappearing” (Marfleet, 2007: 411-12). Community leaders and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and lecturers were targeted repeatedly, encouraging a sense of helplessness and (in theory) demobilizing the community as a whole (ibid.). With Iraq's Christians, their status as a minority faith makes this process appear more far-reaching. Marfleet (2008) speaks of a national dimension to post-invasion displacement that has disrupted entire socio-cultural, professional, and political networks: Iraqis of all socio-economic status have been affected.

The idea of cumulative causation first appeared in 1957 in Gunnar Myrdal's *Rich Lands and Poor* as “circular and cumulative causation theory”. Douglas Massey (1990: 4-5) introduced “the idea that migration induces changes in social and economic structures that make additional migration likely” in the context of rural Mexican economic migration to the United

States.⁶ With some modification and development, the concept can be useful in relation to displacement in and from Iraq. Massey and others have argued that international migration will sustain itself over time in ways that will make further movements progressively more likely (Massey et al, 1998: 45-46). They explain that “causation is cumulative in the sense that each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, typically in ways that make additional migration more likely” (Massey et al., 1998: 45-46). The expansion of migrant networks can induce further migration as “each act of migration creates the social structure needed to sustain it” (Massey et al, 1998: 46). Every new migrant reduces the costs and risks of subsequent migration for friends and relatives. This is also evident in forced migration and is testable at the individual level. I explore the extent to which migrant networks influenced migration decisions. How important were connections to people who had already left in the decision to leave?

The theory also posits that “as a household's sense of relative deprivation increases, so does the motivation to migrate” (ibid.). Sustained out-migration can lead to the depletion of human resources in sending regions and to accumulation in receiving areas. Over time, growth is reinforced in receiving areas and is simultaneously depleted in sending areas where stagnation is exacerbated. The conditions for migration are thus further enhanced (Massey et al, 1998:48). In Iraq, deprivation has not been purely relative. Most refugees are compelled to take decisions that mean abandoning crucial material, social, and psychological assets. In doing so, they devalue the assets of those who remain, compelling them to move. Eventually, “a threshold is reached at which community integrity breaks down, stimulating further rapid outward movements” (Marfleet, 2007: 407). I explore the extent to which the devaluation of these assets has compelled migration. I ask whether, as more people from a reference group migrated, those remaining felt an increasing sense of insecurity which pressured them to leave.

With Elizabeth Fussell, Massey (2004: 151-71) later suggested that there were limits to cumulative causation in urban areas for several reasons. Again the study focuses on Mexican

⁶ His writings on the subject have been extensive. Here I focus on the following selection of writings authored and co-authored by Massey: “Social Structure, Household Strategies, and the Cumulative Causation of Migration” (1990); “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal” (1993); “Contemporary Theories of Migration” a chapter from *Worlds in Motion* (1998: reprinted in paperback 2005); “The Limits to Cumulative Causation: International Migration from Mexican Urban Areas” (2004). The selection will allow for a critical discussion of the theory's development.

migration to and from the United States. First, “the social networks of urbanites are composed more of weak ties to acquaintances and workmates than of strong ties to kin and lifelong friends”. Face-to-face contacts are more selective and less drawn from a community as a whole (Fussell and Massey, 2004: 153). The migration experience within an urban setting may be characterised more by gaining access to a network and information that facilitates migration than by the assumption of an existing relationship with a migrant (ibid.). In Iraqi neighbourhoods there may be less truth in the statement that social ties are weak in urban settings as suggested above for Mexican and American urban settings. There is still a strong chance that through close or extended kinship there will be a migration connection owing to generations of out-migration from Iraq. The anonymity associated with high population density in urban settings is cited as another reason for the effects of cumulative causation being weaker. Massey and Fussell write that in small rural settlements migrants there will be known in a face-to-face context through overlapping networks of kinship and friendship (ibid.). This may be weaker in many larger cities but perhaps less so in Baghdad neighbourhoods where residents tend to have regular interactions with their neighbours – this is something evident in chapters 4-6.⁷ In Iraq, the decades-long history of migration documented by Chatelard (2002a, 2002b, 2008a, 2008b), and the current national character of displacement (Marfleet, 2008) may have combined to counter the effects of such dilution in urban settings.

In the context of economic remittances, Fussell and Massey (2004: 153-4) also suggest that feedbacks found in rural settings may not be significant enough in large urban populations to encourage further journeys. When large numbers of rural village residents leave, agricultural land is often neglected and left fallow. In the case of forced migration in urban areas of Iraq, feedback mechanisms manifest themselves differently. The flight of Iraq's professionals, particularly in the health and education sector, has had detrimental effects on the country's critical public infrastructure. Furthermore, rather than land lying fallow there is the idea that the neighbourhood is transformed and lies socially fallow. I mean this in the sense that important social networks are no longer there to provide support or even a sense of security. In many Iraqi neighbourhoods after 2003, houses once occupied by families which were neighbours for decades were emptied of their occupants and replaced with new ones. This is an important transformation of space. Here I use Doreen Massey's (1994) concept of space

⁷ My participants from Baghdad had regular interactions with their neighbours although their relations did not extend to consulting – or even informing – them about migration decisions.



Neighbourhood scenes from Baghdad. Figure 1 (above): two men passing through the neighbourhood in 2001. They were offering their services pruning and harvesting the date palms common to gardens in Iraq.

Figure 2 (below): Boys play football in a Baghdad neighbourhood in 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati)



understood as constituted out of social relations. These relations are inherently dynamic and are "imbued with power and meaning and symbolism" (Doreen Massey, 1994: 2-3). Transformations of space that change social relations into relations of subjugation and possible threat are likely to induce displacement among those who perceive threats in the new configurations. Feedback mechanisms from neighbourhood transformations may not result in cross-border movement - but perhaps movement to another neighbourhood. I learned about these phenomena from participants during fieldwork. Some migrated temporarily from Iraq but told of the complex depletion and confessional "un-mixing" of neighbourhoods.⁸

Another problem with the theory of cumulative causation in urban areas is that the urban context, with its more favourable economic conditions in relation to small cities or rural towns, often reduces the necessity of international migration from larger cities (Massey et al, 2005: 154). Sadly economic conditions in Iraq's big cities, notably the capital Baghdad, have been dire. Unemployment sky-rocketed after the occupation and the ensuing economic collapse and Baghdad experienced intense sectarian violence so that this suggested limitation of cumulative causation has its own limitations.

Finally, Massey and Fussell (2004) suggest that urbanites may not need social ties to make international journeys. This may certainly be true in the Iraqi context. There is no language barrier and with a protracted history of Iraqi migration to Syria, information about moving there may be so widely available (though not necessarily reliable) that personal ties to migrants abroad are not needed to move there. I tested these questions at the individual level.

Cumulative causation is a dynamic theory, though it may seem implicitly deterministic given the belief in the compelling internal momentum of evolving migration structures. Will all of those who are connected to evolving migration structures migrate as a result of this momentum? Cumulative causation will not necessarily lead to every individual with connections abroad migrating. Indeed, the theory

... accepts the view of international migration as an individual or household decision process, but argues that acts of migration at one point in time systematically alter the context within which future migration decisions are made, greatly increasing the likelihood

⁸ See Chapter 5.

that later decision makers will choose to migrate (Massey et al, 1993: 449).

Cumulative causation alters the context: options to leave gradually become less difficult, and simultaneously constraints upon those that remain increase. At its peak it can leave groups and individuals in hard choice situations and can thus be seen as a coercive dynamic. There is still agency in decisions which take place under these circumstances, but there is intense constraint in the latter.

Cultural communities

The notion of “cultural communities” is a useful tool in understanding how dynamics of a large migration outflow affects those who stay behind. They are based on important familial ties, language, religious practices, and traditions. As more and more people leave their homes, communities begin to break down and eventually the cost of remaining increases (Moore and Shellman, 2004: 726-9). Events in Iraq demonstrate that networks upon which so many Iraqis depend have been seriously, if not completely, diminished by displacement. In answering questions about the migration decision making process, I hoped to learn about how much the depletion of a person's social networks and cultural community influences these decisions.

Deliberations & Consultations

I have noted the importance and complexity of these migration decisions. But how are they made? Aristotle spoke of deliberations intrinsic to making a moral choice which differ from the idea of a “wish”. Wish has for its object an end, but moral choice implies the *means* to the end (Aristotle, NE iii 1: 56-60). Deliberations are made about practical matters which in general can be affected through agents' own instrumentality (Aristotle, NE iii 3: 61-62). The assumption here is that in leaving their homes, the “wish” for Iraqis was survival and security, and migration - an act achievable through their own instrumentality - was the means. Once individuals have set before them this certain end:

... they look how and through what means it may be accomplished: if there is a choice of means, they examine further which are easiest and most creditable; or, if there is but one means of accomplishing the object, then how it may be through this, this again through what, till they come to the first cause; and this will be the last found; for a man engaged in

a process of deliberation seems to seek and analyse, as a man, to solve a problem, analyses the figure given him (Aristotle, NE iii 3: 63).

The greater the matter, the less we trust in ourselves to settle it alone, associating with co-adjustors in counsel. Possibilities are what may be done through our own instrumentality, but this includes what may also be done through our friends because the origination rests with us (NE iii 3: 62-3). The decision to leave one's home, one of gravity, will not have been taken lightly. So in whom did Iraqis trust to seek guidance? Cohen & Sirkeci (2011: 2) assert that "... migrants do not act alone. They come to their decisions in discussions with other members of their households and with friends and relatives at points of origin and destination." Sometimes the household is ignored, at others times it is overwhelming, but it is always present in the decisions (ibid.). The household itself is not a reference to the people living in the physical structure but a dynamic and fluid unit which transcends geographical place and includes individuals who live in a variety of places (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011: 28). How true is this for Iraqi migration decisions? We shall see in the following chapters.

Conclusion

I have presented a selection of different categories of forced migration in scholarly works. I have shown how the processes of displacement and forced migration are related to transformations of the state. All are threat-induced, involving decisions to move taken under duress. These decisions are taken after deliberations, consultations and calculations. In themselves they were voluntary decisions: however, the circumstances under which they were taken were not of the decision makers' choosing. These circumstances, which limit a person to a selection of unpalatable proposals, are beyond the control of the people at the centre of this research. They were forced upon them and therefore can be seen as coerced decisions - the migration correctly defined as forced migration. Decisions of people to leave can coerce those who remain into moving. Even if they had not considered it initially, the effects of departures of people in their social world can exert coercive pressures to leave on those who remain. Decisions to move house, move city, and possibly move country, are of magnitude and are unlikely to be taken alone. In the following chapters I show how transformations that took place after 2003 created coercive circumstances and how these coercive pressures impacted on peoples lives, eventually forcing many of them to leave.

Chapter 2

Methodology of the thesis

Here I explain why I chose a narrative framework for my research. While acknowledging the problematic nature of memory as a source of data, I argue that personal accounts are still an important source for researchers in the human sciences. I then discuss the context within which participants told their stories. In the second part of this chapter I outline how I collected data in Syria. I explain how I met the people interviewed and make observations about how relationships established with my participants may have shaped the data.

Why narrative methods?

I have chosen a narrative framework because of the universal nature of the narrative form as a means of human sense-making. Riessman (2008b: 154) comments that “Individuals interpret events and experiences in the stories they construct collaboratively with listeners. As investigators we, in turn, interpret their interpretations, constructing analytic stories from (and ideally with) those we study”. Bruner (2004: 708) tells us that “a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold ...”.¹ The way that a person recounts past experiences changes with different social, temporal and geographical contexts. I am in agreement with certain elements of the experience-centred approach to narrative (Squire, 2008: 42-43) in its assumptions that narratives are sequential and meaningful. They re-present experience and reconstitute it as well as express it. They display transformation and change (ibid.). This does not necessarily mean that displacement narratives and interpretations of them are detached from material realities. The historian E. H. Carr said (2001: 21): “It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes”. To extend Carr's metaphor accordingly for narrative research, we can add that a person's recollection of the mountain changes over time, as do memories of the journey up or down it. Perhaps the pain and triumph in the climb are suppressed or emphasised in narrations of the journey according to the

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For a discussion of narrative form and its influence on shaping life experience, see Bruner (2004).

context of its telling. The narratives I collected are grounded in lived experiences of displacement and forced migration but I am aware of the fluid and complex nature of memory and narrative as representations of experience. Across time and place, there is some reconstruction of stories. These are never repeated exactly and words acquire different meanings across time (Squire, 2008: 42). This is just as true of the researcher as it is of the participants. Andrews (2008: 93) observes that:

The historical context in which we produce our work not only frames its meaning, but is not replicable in other places and times. Even the very same words carry different meanings when they are authored – or read – in different places and times.

I say more about this issue later in this chapter in relation to the research context of Syria.

A narrative framework is useful because it encourages participants to speak in their own way and facilitates personal reflection (Riessman 2008a). Mishler (1986: 7) argues that the goal of the research interview should be to understand respondents' worlds of meaning in a way that is "adequate to the tasks of systematic analysis and theoretical interpretation." He advocates for the unstructured narrative interview:

We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses. Nonetheless respondents may also tell stories in response to direct, specific questions if they are not interrupted by interviewers trying to keep them to the "point." (Mishler, 1986: 69)

The interview is a collaboration in which the interviewer and the participant engage in a conversation (Riessman 2008a: 23, Mishler, 1986). Interviewees can develop narrative accounts of their experiences: "The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (Riessman, 2008a: 23). This was the approach I used in order to gather accounts of my participants' experiences of displacement. Interviews were not completely open-ended. I guided the course of the exchange but, as Mishler advises, endeavoured to avoid interrupting participants if it seemed like they were straying from the point. I did not entirely "give up control" or always "follow participants

down *their* trails” as Riessman (2008a: 24) recommends in order to obtain full extended narration. This was because I had a conceptual focus to the study and was not seeking data that stretched across a participant's lifespan. However, the paths I pursued during interviews were still broad enough in themselves to elicit detailed narratives. For example, I wanted to understand what a person's daily life was like both before and after the invasion in 2003 so as to identify changes that may have exerted coercive pressures. These open questions about daily life prompted an exchange that produced rich and detailed narrative. During some interviews with participants who were not forthcoming, I relied on a set of open-ended key questions each with its own sub-questions. They were comparatively closed in nature. I did not need to go mechanically through the latter in any interviews but on some occasions I did use the open-ended questions to prompt conversation. This was effective in eliciting stories and details. During most interviews I barely needed to refer to my questions as participants were open and forthcoming.

My approach to knowledge generation was case-study based. From detailed cases I sought to make theoretical inferences. I am in agreement with Mishler (1996: 80) that case-based methods grant individuals coherence and unity through time, “respecting them as subjects with both histories and intentions”. Conceptual inferences can be made about social processes from close analysis of in-depth case material (Riessman, 2008a: 13). These sequential, temporally ordered social processes are “fundamental features of personal and social life” and there is a “structuring impact of earlier on later events” (Mishler, 1996: 89). This is an important recognition in the analysis of the process of displacement. I was aware that pressures and threats may accumulate to the point at which a threshold is reached. An event which may not have felt threatening in the past may take on extra meaning as threats accumulate and pressures increase. A note at the door from a militia telling a family to leave home will have a greater coercive impact if that family has already experienced violence at the hands of that militia.

On the problems of memory

Data gathered from these detailed narrative case studies, created by an interaction between the researcher and participant, are not precise representations of a past reality. Memory is a complex matter and people recall events and details in an incomplete and unspecific way. Cameron (2010) shows this in an assessment of the limits of memory in refugee status determination decisions. Decades of research has established that “human memory is nothing

like a video recording, that it is neither as complete nor as stable” (Cameron, 2010: 470).

Whole categories of information are difficult to recall accurately, if at all: temporal information, such as dates, frequency, duration and sequence; the appearance of common objects; discrete instances of repeated events; peripheral information; proper names; and the verbatim wording of verbal exchanges. In addition, our autobiographical memories change over time, and may change significantly. (Cameron, 2010: 469)

We can remember events in considerable detail but still have only a vague idea of their date, frequency and duration (Cameron, 2010: 470). Even with repeated distressing events, research has shown the limits of human memory in recalling events and dates precisely. Cameron (2010: 482-483) cites a study by Bidrose & Goodman (2000) of four young people (ages eight to 15 years old) who were exploited by a prostitution and pornography ring. Police arrested the abusers and seized hundreds of audio tapes and photographs. When the young people were interviewed about specific incidents, they had no memory at all for 39% of the acts of abuse inflicted on them, despite there being conclusive evidence of their occurrence. “The researchers concluded that the children's memories of these repeated events had simply fused” (ibid.). The point Cameron is making is that an inability to recall distressing events in detail does not mean the events never occurred.

This is what memory researchers in psychology have referred to as a “generic script memory”: repeated events are merged and blended together (Cameron, 2010: 481). Themes and the gist of events are remembered, precluding the need to retain precise details which are typically not useful to us. This occurs with memories of mundane as well as distressing events (ibid.). Repeated distressing events - such as personal death threats, witnessing car bombs, and assassinations - were all part of the coercive landscapes in which many of the Iraqis I interviewed lived their daily lives. I have not been concerned primarily with precise dates and statistics but with subjective perceptions of threat that were crucial in Iraqis' decisions to leave. At times precise and approximate dates do appear and give an idea of the timeframe within which decisions were taken. This is often because some Iraqis learn to bring documents with them to verify facts for UNHCR resettlement officers. Dates are recorded during the UNHCR registration process which help to cement them into memory. It is the general script of events and their details rather than their precise dates that I am concerned with. The verbatim wording of a threat letter is not significant but its meaning in the view of

the recipient is.

The conceptualisation of memory that Cameron criticises is similar to that which Plummer (2001: 234) calls the memory as “storehouse” and in which memories are “more or less piled up and become more or less accessible”. Cameron's critique is valuable, particularly for the legal community to comprehend for more accurate determinations of refugee status, but it is itself limited to being a thorough critique of a limited concept of memory. My concern is not with proving or disproving factual or temporal truths. I agree with Plummer that memory works on different levels and the storehouse version, where the focus is upon what a person can recall and how well in relation to certain factors – such as tiredness – is only one of them (Plummer, 2001: 234). Memory is “a socially shared experience” and not just an inner psychological one (ibid.) It is the source of the selective narratives which people tell about their past. The storied ordering of memories is what Plummer refers to when he says “Our narratives are our memories” (ibid.). Bruner has explained the inherent ways in which memory and narrative are connected:

... the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. (Bruner, 1996: 708)

Memories originate in the realities of past events but are affected by current circumstances. Kohli states that “the reference to past events occurs in the context of the present situation, and under the criterion of their significance” (1981: 67, in Andrews 1991: 65). This is important to keep in mind in the Iraqi context and an important justification for interviewing Iraqis in Syria - the first port of call for many. Syria is a neighbour of Iraq and from 2006 was the only country allowing them relatively easy entry. The past events that are the focus of my research are the same events that brought them to Syria. It may be that the resettlement process and problems of survival in their liminal situation in Syria are refugees' most salient concerns. But they are in that situation because of the circumstances which are the focus of my research. These also feature in the resettlement process, where displacement stories help or hinder claims for refugee status in third countries - depending on how these stories are understood by UNHCR resettlement officers. In exploring those moments in their lives which led to displacement, there is an advantage to interviewing participants while they are living in

a present still immediately and intimately connected to those moments.

Narratives are co-constructed and this is especially true in the context of research interviews where there is a conceptual focus. Holstein and Gubrium (2003: 4) note the increased awareness in the human sciences that “knowledge is created from the actions undertaken to obtain it”, such as “the social encounter of the interview in which knowledge is constructed”. This co-construction is affected by an audience that goes beyond the listening ear of the researcher. The ways in which memories are expressed as meaningful narratives varies in relation to the audience that the teller believes he or she is speaking to (Andrews, 2007:16-17). Most people tell their stories to others as well as themselves – who those others are, as well as who they are in the moment of the telling, influences the stories which are told. As researchers we should try to identify who the interviewees believe they are speaking to - how they perceive us (ibid.).

Equally, if not more important, are the “ghostly audiences” (Langellier 2001: 174) – those persons central in the lives of our respondents, for whom or to whom the story may be being told. We as researchers often have little or no knowledge of this imagined audience, yet their presence in our work is significant (Andrews, 2007: 17).

Although it is difficult – or impossible - to know fully how my participants really viewed me, or to identify the “ghost audience” I can say that I was seen by them in many ways: as a friend, a teacher, an employee of the UNHCR, as a person who could expedite their hopes for resettlement to North America, as an academic, an educated Iraqi, from Baghdad, a Brit living in London, a man, as a means to address an international audience about the plight of the Iraqi Mandaean, and as a Muslim.

For Kuhn (2000:189) memory is “always already textual” and memory texts have “their own Formal Conventions”. My focus here is on the thematic analysis of narrative, I am interested more in the *told* rather than the *telling* (Riessman, 2008a). However, I do not view displacement narratives solely as textual constructions: “a narratological analysis can disarticulate these stories from the politics of displacement” and displacement narratives are clearly marked by material conditions and human experience (Nassari, 2007: 56-57). Memories are mediated in complex ways related to the moment of their telling – between

researcher and subject, between speaker and listener - but memory work is not about reducing them to fiction - “it is their relation to lived historical experience that constitutes their specificity” (Radstone, 2000: 11).

Memory is modified over time and in changing contexts the meanings that are ascribed to past events change. Kuhn (2000: 189) speaks of the active production of meaning in memory which is “shaped by secondary revision. ... For while it might refer to past events and experiences, memory is neither pure experience nor pure event.” Memory undergoes revisions across time and the memories articulated in a research interview differ from those remembered among family members looking through old photographs (ibid.). These revisions and different articulations make memory a fluid and complex source of data. Nevertheless, it is a crucial one for social researchers as:

... it is a sensitive indicator of an individual's internal construction of an external event. ... When an individual looks back at her life, she makes connections between events and situations which she would not have had the perspective to make at the time she lived through them. ... However ... these recollections are not stored in pure form, and instead what the listener hears is how the speaker, in her present life, makes sense of her past. (Andrews, 1991:65)

Internal constructions of an event can vary even between close relatives in the same nuclear family. Nguyen's (2009) study of women in the Vietnamese Diaspora includes a comparison of two sisters' accounts of the same events of displacement and loss. They converge on some matters but differ on others, showing that “their memories convey individual recreations and interpretations of shared events, as well as their family dynamics” (Nguyen, 2009:36). Both sisters were able to construct coherent if sometimes divergent narratives about the same crucial and traumatic events in their lives (Nguyen, 2009:55). “Their perceptions of their shared past indicate the way in which each found it most expedient to process events, experiences, and losses” (Nguyen, 2009: 56). I did not seek to acquire different accounts of displacement experiences from different members of the same family in this study but make the point that the data we can acquire and present as researchers is partial in nature. This does not invalidate their individual accounts. Clifford has remarked on the inherently partial nature of ethnographic truths which are “committed and incomplete” pieces belonging to

“economies of truth” (Clifford, 1986: 7) Portelli (2006: 38) makes a similar observation when he says of oral sources that “they are *artificial, variable, and partial*.” This is also where their strengths lie. “Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli, 2006: 36).

I now consider some of the ways in which the contextual realities may have influenced the data.

Stories are not told in a vacuum

I had collected all of the narratives used in this research before the anti-government protest movement emerged in Syria. The Syrian regime was in a stable position and had survived attempts to destabilise it by the American administration of George W Bush which viewed Syria as an extension of Iranian influence in the region and labelled it as part of the “Axis of Evil”, which also included the regime of Saddam Hussein toppled by force in 2003. In 2005, when millionaire Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in Beirut, the United States and France led calls for the withdrawal of Syrian soldiers from Lebanon and for members of the Syrian regime to be investigated for alleged involvement in Hariri's murder. There were growing accusations levelled at Syria by the United States of its involvement in armed resistance and terrorism in Iraq – in October 2008 a number of Syrian civilians were killed in a United States military raid in the border town of Abu Kamal (BBC, 2008). However, in 2010 there appeared to be no domestic challenges to the authority of the Assad regime. Iraqis in Syria were waiting in a place that was relatively secure. There was none of the lawlessness that still plagued Iraq - Iraqis and others in Syria could feel safe from crime in most of the country. For those whose residency rights had expired the feeling was different - though it should be said that corruption was prevalent throughout the Syrian bureaucracy so there were often ways around residency restrictions for people able to pay bribes. Until March 2011 Syria was a country of safety for nearly all the people I interviewed.

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and the military intervention in Libya were televised and watched closely by people in Syria. Most of my Iraqi friends, acquaintances, and participants, feared what would happen if a movement began in Syria to depose the Assad regime, particularly those who had made some progress with their resettlement cases. The American embassy in Syria announced the closure of all its visa services on July 11th 2011

after sustaining damage during violent anti-American protests.² It was a huge blow for the Iraqis I knew who had been referred for resettlement to the United States by UNHCR. Some had been waiting for an interview with an American government official from the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) for many months. They also feared that the popular slogan of the Arab Spring - “the people want the fall of the regime” - would come to fruition in Syria. They feared they would find themselves in the middle of another violent state collapse and some worried they would be targeted because officially they were “guests” of the government of Syria. It is hard to say how differently they would have told their stories about Iraq had I been interviewing them after the Arab Spring. I might have acquired a less detailed set of stories about the past when the possibilities of radical political change on their doorsteps dominated their present. This would have been exacerbated by the fact that after March 2011, Syrians began openly speaking about politics with acquaintances and even strangers.³

It was fortunate that I did manage to collect my interviews before the anti-government protests began. I left Syria early in August 2011. Army checkpoints appeared around the perimeter of the city around June that year, creating a fortified line between the two provinces of Damascus (i.e. the city) and Rural Damascus⁴, the latter being the site of a growing number of anti-regime demonstrations that were dealt with violently. It was in parts of Rural Damascus that most Iraqis lived, in neighbourhoods like Jaramana and Sayidda Zaineb. A checkpoint established in June, consisting of a number of soldiers and heavy machine guns where Jaramana met Damascus proper, had become a small camp with at least a dozen soldiers by early August. Soldiers and security officials had beefed up their presence and were carrying out more ID checks and searches throughout the city. Although I had a research permit it may not have quelled their suspicions to find a digital recorder in the hands of a British passport holder. It may also have caused problems for Iraqis whom I befriended and whose homes I frequented whilst doing my research.

Only on two occasions did I sense that Iraqis I interviewed feared speaking about what had happened to them in Iraq. One participant strongly criticised Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki at the end of the interview and later asked me not to mention any of it in my research. He feared what would happen if he had to return. This was the same reason another

² All embassy operations were formally suspended on February 6th 2012.

³ I had regular conversations with taxi drivers – pro and anti-regime – after the protest movement began (around March 2011) about domestic politics, subjects which were taboo with strangers before then.

⁴ Rural Damascus - *Reef Dimashq* - is the administrative name for the suburbs of the city.

participant would not mention the names of groups of “outsiders” who he was certain were to blame for displacing local residents and merchants in Iraq.

Most of the Iraqis I knew in Syria did not comment on the political situation there before the protest movement began. They were nearly all grateful for the fact that they were allowed to be in the secure country of Syria, acknowledging that it was not a wealthy country yet was hosting a huge population of displaced Iraqis. They did not complain about the government's position of only granting them temporary stay and not formally allowing them to work. Nearly all of them had uncomplimentary things to say about the UNHCR. Others would speak about bad treatment at the hands of Syrian immigration officers when renewing their residency permits - but never while my recorder was on. One participant, Maher, hushed his wife Rania when she began to speak of prejudice she had experienced from Syrians.

Why was there a disparity in speaking freely of the present and the past? As Andrews says: “Stories are never told in a vacuum ... ” (2007: 3). Iraqis had moved from one police state to another. There are red lines to be aware of and criticising any element of the Syrian regime was one of them. Iraqis' residency situation has been tenuous, especially since visa restrictions were introduced in 2007 - they generally feel vulnerable and know that they can easily be deported from Syria, though this has rarely happened. Their situation in Syria was not a focus of my research but it was clearly a more problematic story to record – on my Dictaphone as well as the historical record - than stories of their displacement in Iraq. I built friendships and relationships of exchange with the individuals I interviewed and they often spoke at length about distressing subjects. But as Andrews writes:

... the “tell-ability” of stories is highly influenced not only by the level of intimacy between speaker and listener, but critically by the larger context in which the narrative is recounted (Andrews, 2007: 33).

Speaking about the catastrophe which was the 2003 invasion of Iraq was never a problem in Syria. The government of Syria had always been an opponent of the invasion, worried in part that its success would lead to an attempt at a American led regime change in Syria. The Syrian regime derived some legitimacy from “Resistance”, referring specifically to its foreign policy of resistance against American and Israeli regional ambitions. The presence of displaced



Figure 3 (above): Damascus at sunset taken from mount Qasioun in 2011.



Figure 4 (above): A Syrian Army helicopter hovers low over central Damascus in July 2011. A camera crew inside films a pro-regime rally which is shown on Syrian state television and the regime-friendly Adunnya TV.



Figure 5 (above): A procession of Shia pilgrims in Damascus commemorate *Arba'een* in 2009. Behind them hangs a large poster of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad opposite the Iraqi restaurant in Sayidda Zaineb that paid for it.



Figure 6 (above): A once typically bustling street by a popular Iraqi restaurant in Sayidda Zaineb, Damascus 2011. The owners have since moved to Iraq because, after the anti-government uprising began, business declined and the security situation became precarious.

Iraqis proved the regime's point that 2003 was the start of an occupation and not a liberation. This is not to suggest that Iraqis' resentment at the United States stemmed from an internalisation of Syrian state discourse of resistance, or that Iraqis had internalised this discourse – most of the Iraqis I knew were sceptical of state discourse.⁵ But stories of displacement in post-invasion Iraq were “tell-able” in Syria in the sense that they were in harmony with state discourse on regional politics.⁶

I want to offer some reflections on the different possibilities of how these displacement stories may have been told in a different context. When we collect narratives and record them in printed form we risk freezing the story at the expense of others.

If it is written down, placed in a museum, turned into a book (as many memories are), then it can “freeze” the story - making a process and experience become a fixed event. It may serve ironically to lose other ways of telling the story or the life. (Plummer, 2001: 234)

The narratives in this thesis are based on participants' recollections of past events at a particular moment in time, shaped by the researcher and the research context. We should be aware that these narratives are snapshots – rooted in the past but also formed by the interview context. How would Iraqis' recollection of events, of the decision to leave Iraq, be affected by the situation in Syria today? BBC Arabic news showed footage of Iraqis returning to Baghdad from Damascus after being kicked out of their homes in Sayidda Zaineb by armed men claiming to be members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).⁷ How might an experience like that have influenced reflections on past decisions to leave when those decisions, even forced ones, have led them into another situation of danger? How would they have told their stories if I had interviewed them after a second major forced migration? We cannot know of course but these are important factors to acknowledge.

I want to consider how reflections on the decision to leave Iraq in 2006 might have been

⁵ Whether the language and tropes used in Iraqis' narratives of displacement were affected by the official state discourse of Resistance is not a subject I can pursue here, but one worthy of research.

⁶ According to a researcher I met in Syria in February 2009, the Iraqi refugee issue was salient in Syrian state media until the election of Obama in the United States. There followed a temporary warming of relations between the two countries and the Iraqi refugee issue almost disappeared from the press.

⁷ The report can be seen here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gP_KTThdY9M]. Al Jazeera English reported in May 2011 that 2000 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHRC Syria had returned to Iraq because of violence in Syria (AJE, 2011). Early in August 2012, UN officials in Baghdad reported 22,300 Iraqis had returned from Syria (Schreck, 2012).

influenced by having to return there owing to threats from Syria's ongoing armed conflict. How would my participants have told their stories about threat perception in their Iraqi neighbourhoods in 2006? Perhaps they would need to suppress memories of events which prompted their earlier decisions to flee so that they could cope with the reality of having to return to Iraq. Perhaps upon returning to Iraq in 2012 - from a Syrian town shelled by regime forces – the sporadic violence in Baghdad would seem bearable in comparison to that and to the memories of intense violence in Baghdad in 2006. Conversely, how might my participants reflect on their stories after reaching the safety of asylum in North America? The sisters in Nguyen's (2009) study constructed narratives in ways which helped them to process past losses and deal with their present circumstances. These are things I cannot know now, but would make for an interesting investigation.

The setting in Damascus allowed and even encouraged Iraqis to express feelings of fear and insecurity that prompted decisions to leave for Syria. Iraqis seeking resettlement to a third country via the UNHCR realised the necessity of emphasising threats and recalling them methodically in certain contexts. This is also another good reason for conducting research interviews in the Syrian context rather than waiting until they reach a third country. Upon arrival in the United States or Canada, Iraqis can begin to forget these difficult memories and maybe bury a severely distressing past. In Syria, those seeking resettlement are not *allowed* to forget them. They must keep them in mind for the resettlement officers at the UNHCR, for the interview with the IOM and immigration officers of the desired country of refuge. In the case of one of my participants, Anwar, this process lasted four years. Others, he told me, had waited for six years. Hadi encapsulated this when I was acting as an interpreter for an American lawyer preparing him for his resettlement interview at the UNCHR. The lawyer prompted Hadi to recall memories of his harsh experiences of detention and military service in Iraq during the 1980s and the early 1990s. Hadi could expect to be asked about his past in order to ascertain that he had not been a high ranking Ba'athist or been involved in human rights abuses. Afterwards Hadi said: “Really, I tried to forget about all of these things. When I thought about them I would dream about tanks floating in the sky”. Until he reaches a secure country of resettlement, Hadi will not be allowed to forget these things.

As Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 1) observe: “Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.” The

UNHCR resettlement process means that these displacement stories become instruments through which Iraqi families can acquire refuge in third countries and begin to take their lives forward. These narratives also serve to justify their continued presence in Syria, however difficult the circumstances. An Iraqi family can justify remaining in a tough situation in Syria by not forgetting what led them there in the first place, a story which many also hope will take them forward into a secure country of refuge. This is also an example of meaning making and the need to make sense of the present. It is what Colin Davis⁸ informs us is “the need to make habitable meanings from uninhabitable truths.” Reflections and memories of their experiences help them make sense of their present as well as of what happened to them in the past.

How did I collect these stories? In the next section I provide details of my field-work and speak about the individuals I interviewed and the organisations and individuals who introduced them to me. I make observations about how I believed they saw me and about the dynamics of relationships which may have affected the data.

Collecting the interviews in Damascus

Across a 13 month period in Damascus I completed 29 interviews. Iraqi Arabic was the language of all but eight that were undertaken in English. I transcribed Arabic interviews directly into English: I did the transcription and translation for all but one, which I paid an Iraqi student to do. There were eight women in the sample. Four were aged 20-21, two were in their mid 20s, and two in their late 40s. Of the men, eight were in their 20s, three were aged 30-40. Five were in their 40s, four in their 50s, and one in his 60s. Muslims, Christians, Mandaean, and atheists are in the sample. The majority came from Baghdad but there were some from other provinces.

The paths I chose in Syria led me to organisations and people who were working to assist displaced Iraqis and that was how I met most of the people I interviewed. Many of the relationships involved some form of exchange as well as friendship. I met the people I interviewed through four networks I engaged with in Damascus. The first I found through teaching at the Education for Iraq Project⁹ (EIP), a non-profit agency based in Damascus and the United States that helps Iraqis to acquire university scholarships in the United States. I

⁸ Colin Davis (1991: 302), quoted in Skultans (1998: 43).

⁹ The name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the students I interviewed.

volunteered as a teacher and interviewed some of the students who also became my friends. The second network came through conducting research for the UNHCR separately from this thesis. I wrote a study *Under the radar but not invisible: Iraqi economic activity in Damascus* for the UNHCR about the employment situation of Iraqis in the Syrian capital. With some guidance from Kamel Dorai of Institut français du Proche Orient (IfPO) in Damascus, I interviewed Iraqis about generating income in the city. I was able to interview three men from the UNHCR study for my doctoral research. I also befriended an Iraqi woman who acted as a research assistant and introduced me to Iraqis who I interviewed in the suburb of Sayidda Zaineb - where she had lived for 10 years. The third network was encountered through the Iraqi Legal Aid Society¹⁰ (ILAS) an organisation that provides Iraqis with legal assistance in their resettlement cases. I volunteered as an interpreter for a law graduate who was also an intern at the UNHCR. Some of the Iraqis I helped through ILAS allowed me to interview them for my research. The fourth was the network of friends I made whilst in Syria. I was not able to interview all the Iraqis I befriended as not all were willing, and there were times of research fatigue when I was unwilling to pursue a lead. I was also lucky enough to be in the field with another researcher, Tahir Zaman, with whom I could discuss and exchange ideas. It was Tahir who informed me about the research opportunity at the UNHCR and introduced me to the only Palestinian of Iraq¹¹ in my sample. I introduced Tahir to my research assistant in Sayidda Zaineb (SZ) and to a prominent Iraqi Mandaean man in Damascus. I now provide details of how I met my participants through these networks.

The Education for Iraqis Project (EIP)

Upon arrival in Damascus I contacted the Education for Iraqis Project (EIP) which helps Iraqi students to apply for university scholarships in the United States. They have helped around 50 students acquire scholarships. The aim is for the student to eventually return to Iraq and contribute to the rebuilding of the country. The project is run from the apartment of an American couple, J & C, who were involved in the anti-sanctions movement in the 1990s. They turned their interests to education after the occupation of 2003, motivated by a humanitarian desire to remedy some of the damage done to Iraqi society by wars and sanctions. I taught academic English to students with highly advanced English aptitude, using

¹⁰ The name has been changed to protect the anonymity of my participants.

¹¹ This is how the creators of the community website *Filistiniyu al Iraq* – Palestinians of Iraq [<http://www.paliraq.com/>] – refer to themselves, and how Palestinian scholar Mohammed (2010) refers to the Palestinian refugees living in Iraq. Mohammed also refers to them simply as “The Refugees”. I refer to them in this thesis as the Palestinians of Iraq.

texts from Refugee Studies so that they could all relate to the subject.¹² It also led to some interesting discussions based on their experiences in Iraq and Syria. I taught academic English from April to July 2010. After that I was co-teaching a drama workshop in July with another researcher, Tahir Zaman. He had also been teaching English to a different group of students. We asked students to read and discuss short theatre scripts and then to write and perform their own short plays about any life experiences in Iraq and Syria. We taught another round of drama classes in late 2010. I taught a weekly note taking class at EIP in July 2011.

I interviewed 10 students from EIP as well as a parent. The students were aged 19-21, though one was a little older at 23. I also spent time socialising with EIP students. First I interviewed students from my own class. They agreed after I answered many questions for them about my research in a class one day. Two of them had earlier told me that they disliked being “studied”. They were referring to times when J & C would invite film makers, activists, and others they knew to come and meet students and sometimes speaking briefly about their activities. They told me that sometimes it felt that those people were coming along to look at strange beings. I was therefore apprehensive initially about asking for interviews. One student later explained that I had not, at least in her eyes, fallen into this category because I had explicitly asked the students for their permission before including them in my research. I hope that the others felt the same way. I believe that the friendships I built with the students as individuals moved me far away from the visitors who would come to observe the students. After I had befriended my students, I found it awkward to ask for interviews because at that moment, and potentially during the interview, the relationship went from being a friendship to one of researcher and participant. There was something uncomfortable about it at first but I realised that a person would not grant an interview if they did not want to.¹³ I think some students were helping me out of duty – to their friend and to a committed volunteer teacher. With other students the duty was different - it was about helping an Iraqi-born researcher to tell the story of what happened to Iraqis after 2003 from their own perspectives. None of the students were the key decision makers in the family as they were too young. Some had been 13 years old in 2003 but still had vivid memories of their surroundings when war broke out. Even though they weren't the decision makers they were witnesses to decisions in the family.

¹² One student later complained about having to read too many depressing articles about refugees so I also used different, less tragedy-centred, material at the end of the course.

¹³ Some of my participants told me after being interviewed that they had enjoyed having somebody listen to their reflections about their displacement experiences with such interest.

I did not use three of the student interviews because I felt that participants had been shielded from the full horrors of their surroundings by their parents and therefore not privy to all of the factors involved in the decision to leave. In one case this was clearly true. I interviewed the reserved Sideeq in his home. He explained that his family left Iraq because it had become dangerous to have a noticeably Sunni name where they lived. Their clan name also made them into targets. Their parents decided to leave Iraq because they were afraid that one of them would be killed at a militia checkpoint because of sectarian affiliation - but this was not the whole story. One of his older brothers was in the room at the time of the interview. Shuhayb was quietly watching television - his attention split between us and the broadcast. I asked Sideeq about threats that he or family members received but he wasn't aware of any. After the interview was over, Shuhayb corrected Sideeq, explaining that two attempts had been made on his life and that their father had been threatened. He explained that it was because they shared their family name with an unpopular Iraqi politician. Shuhayb did not want to be interviewed. Sideeq's testimony revealed an interesting family dynamic, one which I was not privy to with my other participants. But I could not gain a thorough understanding of how their family reached the decision to leave through his story alone and therefore did not include it.

Being of Iraqi origin and able to converse in Iraqi Arabic meant there was hardly any language barrier – and this applied to the participants I met through other networks. In social situations with some of my advanced students, I found myself speaking English. Some had assumed that I couldn't speak Arabic and enjoyed hearing the British accent that I spoke with. It helped to break down the student-teacher boundary. I interviewed some of the student group in Arabic and some in English, letting them choose. If their English was more advanced than my Arabic it seemed better to use English. I made it clear that I wanted them to use Arabic whenever they couldn't find the best way of expression in English, which they did. The students with less advanced English were interviewed in Arabic.

The students had a maturity above the level I expected from students of their age in the UK: perhaps experiencing displacement and war made them mature quickly. But this could also be related to the selection process controlled by J & C. They were effectively the gatekeepers to the group. It was based partly on the student's English aptitude but more on their own ideas about who would be successful in an American academic environment. They not only

controlled admissions but also who could remain on the programme, giving them an enormous amount of power over the students. According to a former teacher who fell out with them after they dismissed a student, they were not aware of their power. The students told me of their anxieties too. The programme was an intensive one because of the workload and because the students' personalities and behaviour were also under scrutiny. Most had been told to “correct” certain of those aspects by J & C whose intentions were always decent, but who often created anxiety in the students. I was careful not to come across in the same way.

A feature of how these young people told their stories was a generally positive tone – with the exception of Mohsin. They were bound to the United States for an education, or could see a realistic hope of it - all of those I interviewed are now there. Was their positive tone a result of their youth, or because they had good prospects (certainly for the next four years)? It was probably a combination of the two and also because of their migration trajectory. The displacement process had not been entirely negative for them individually and they did not feel the same level of loss as their parents. They had lived through the sanctions era but not during the 1980s and the “golden era” of the 1970s before the Iran-Iraq war. At that time the country was prosperous and state social provisions were generous. Most of Iraq was peaceful.¹⁴ Mohsin told his story with a wearier tone. He seemed to have had more exposure to violence than the other students I interviewed – he was a few years older than the other students and had gone out to work after 2003 unlike the other students in the sample. Some of them were young women who were shielded more from the events than younger men, partly because they were not allowed to leave their homes unaccompanied. This was also true of Jasim who was a doctor's son and therefore a prized kidnap target.

UNHCR study

In the summer of 2010 I conducted a study for UNHCR about how Iraqis generated income in Damascus. I explored themes relating to their informal economic activity, including their residency permits or *iqaama*. I investigated their awareness of the need for a work permit, how they found their work, who they work(ed) for and with. I conducted the study with some guidance from Kamel Dorai, a researcher at IfPO Damascus. The interviews I did myself with one exception. At the insistence of UNHCR they took place on their premises in Kafar

¹⁴ The glaring exception being the brutal suppression of the Kurdish population in the north of the country which did not affect Baghdad and the south of the country so much.

Soussa, Damascus. I was able later to interview some of the Iraqis involved in the UNHCR study for my doctoral research. I interviewed three men who had taken part in the UNHCR employment study and I met a woman who I hired as a research assistant. I have included information about them in the biographical appendix.

The Iraqi Legal Aid Society (ILAS)

ILAS provides legal assistance to Iraqis trying to navigate the complicated third country resettlement process. It was established by law students from Yale University and then expanded to include a growing number of qualified lawyers in the United States working pro bono. Initially I did not like the idea of toiling to get Iraqis out of Syria and to the United States where they would most likely spend the rest of their lives struggling to make ends meet in low skilled jobs, unable to pay for health care and possibly other basic needs. I felt it was better for them to remain in Syria if they could not get to a country that catered to their basic needs and where they could have a more dignified existence. It was by chance that I began working for them as an interpreter, as a favour to a friend. I was interpreting for an American law graduate, Jake, who was volunteering at ILAS and also working as an intern at the UNHCR. Jake knew very little Arabic. We became friends as we worked on several other resettlement cases together. Through my work with ILAS I could see that some Iraqis' situations could be improved by their emigration to the United States such as in cases of medical emergency. One man's son had a brain condition that doctors in Syria were unable to diagnose, but perhaps could be treated effectively in the United States. The Iraqis I met through ILAS were aware that life would not be easy in the United States, but they were prepared to take their chances rather than live in uncertain circumstances as “guests” in Syria. Jake knew that I was researching Iraqi displacement so he put me to use on some interesting cases.

It was through my ILAS work that I met Adnaan, a former army parachute instructor who later founded a “Sons of Iraq” unit in his neighbourhood to combat Al Qaeda and other militias. I also met and interviewed his brother, Abu Bakr, an ILAS client and former army officer. I met Hadi through ILAS, a distinguished figure in the Sabeen Mandaean community. He was a gatekeeper to the Mandaeans and still active in Mandaean community affairs even after being displaced to Syria. As well as helping Hadi with his family's own case, Jake took on the cases of other Mandaeans that Hadi had led him to. It was through Hadi that I was able

to interview two Mandaean men, one of them a priest, as well as Hadi himself. It was also through ILAS that I was able to interview Najma.

The ILAS group related detailed accounts of their experiences in Iraq. The quality of the relationship and the context of its telling both account for this. The role of the resettlement process, as discussed earlier, encourages memories of threat and displacement and does not permit Iraqis to forget them. The ILAS group's narratives were highly detailed. This may also have been because all of the group knew me as part of the network through which they were hoping to acquire refuge in North America. I believe that a factor to consider is their impression that the more vividly they could recount their stories of threat to me, the more likely they would remain a priority case for ILAS' legal team and so the better their chances of resettlement. This was not a correct assessment of ILAS' methods – they were constrained in their activities by many different factors - but I think it is a correct assessment of how participants saw me: I relayed messages to Jake and the legal team in the United States about their cases which I came to know well. Understandably they saw me primarily as a member of ILAS. This and the effort I made to help them as an unpaid volunteer elevated the quality of the relationship. They were grateful for this and their desire to help me in return facilitated the interview process. The tone of their interviews were wearier than those of the students mentioned above. I think the positive tone of some of the EIP students was likely an exception rather than the norm. Refugees are typically the losers in war and other radical political reconfigurations. The Mandaeans and former army officers I met through ILAS all fall into this category. Their interviews were mixed in tone. There was a sadness in them and a pessimism about the future of the country from which they had been excluded. The pessimistic assessments of Adnaan may have been correct. They may also have been a result of his exclusion as a Sunni Arab and army officer and the need to emphasise the bleak prospects of his return to someone he views as a potential facilitator of asylum.

Friends

Three of my participants were friends, including a married couple - both Baghdadi artists active in the Damascus art scene. They had already been accepted for resettlement in the United States before meeting me. I had come to know Maher and Rania at social occasions. I interviewed Maher in Rania's presence but couldn't interview Rania separately. Anwar I also met during social occasions. He later agreed to be my research assistant but was told he would

be resettled to the United States within weeks so understandably could not do so in the circumstances. I interviewed him in my apartment a few days before his departure. I had also agreed to help him by translating and subtitling a short documentary film he had made about an Iraqi family in Damascus. It was an implicit exchange between friends as well as between researcher and participant.

It was through my friend and fellow researcher Tahir Zaman that I was able to interview a Palestinian man displaced from Iraq. Tahir introduced me to him. He was actively involved in community affairs, dedicated to documenting the deaths and attacks on Palestinians in Iraq, and also a regular contributor to a community website documenting their plight. Initially he was reluctant to talk about his personal experiences to a researcher but later agreed. He felt obliged to speak on behalf of the Palestinian community throughout the interview. Early on in the interview, conducted in his apartment in a Palestinian neighbourhood in Damascus, he was speaking more generally about the situation of the Palestinians. As I tried to steer it towards his personal experiences he asked me to allow him to speak about certain broader issues first, and then he would speak about his own experience. I believe he wanted to get a message out to the world about what was happening to the Palestinians and he saw me as a scholar who may be able to reach an international audience. This was also a feature of my interactions with Hadi. He had been a vociferous advocate of minority rights in Iraq and I believe was speaking to a wider audience when I interviewed him. He wanted the interviews he gave to raise awareness of what was happening to the Mandaeans in Iraq.

The interview questions

IfPO and Oxford University began a study on forced migration decision making in post-2003 Iraq before I had started my PhD. It was wider in scope than my PhD, including Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, and making use of many researchers. My supervisor, Philip Marfleet, introduced me to its researchers and I was allowed to see the questions they were asking.¹⁵ It did influence the list of questions I created for my PhD but the IfPO study was not based on a narrative framework or designed to gather extended narration, probably because of practical constraints as it included around 150 participants. I created a list of open-ended questions about daily life before and after the invasion. I wanted to know if daily life had changed in ways that exerted coercive pressure on the decision to leave. These open-

¹⁵ See Appendix 3 for a list of the questions.

ended questions led, in most cases, to long and detailed accounts of life under occupation and how people amended their daily routines to adapt to it. However I also had a list of sub-questions as a back up, but most of the time these were answered through conversations triggered by the open questions. I wasn't always able to ask every question in every interview, and not all questions would get an answer. The sub-questions were useful when participants were reticent.

I had met Geraldine Chatelard in Amman and Kamel Dorai in Damascus during a visit to the field in February 2009. Geraldine was overseeing the IfPO research project in Amman, and Kamel in Damascus - I benefited from discussions with them. I met the other researchers in Amman and Damascus and translated an interview with an Iraqi boy, aged around eight years, into English. I was also allowed to see translations from other interviews. Having yet to interview anyone at that stage, the experience was valuable.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Before each interview I explained that the purpose of the study was to understand why Iraqis had left their homes and how they came to take migration decisions. I explained that I would be asking about what their daily lives were like before 2003 and whether or how they had changed afterwards. I assured participants of their anonymity and asked them if they would like to pick their own pseudonym or let me choose one for them. I obtained consent from my participants and explained that they could withdraw it at any time.

Where I recorded interviews, I provided a copy to those who desired it. I did not make the same offer with the interview transcripts. They were all in English and not completed until months after the interviews. I also explained that the recordings would be kept by me and not made available to the public, but that I would be translating them into English and sections of the anonymous transcriptions would appear in my thesis and any publications evolving from it. They were informed that copies of my thesis would be publicly available at the libraries of the University of East London, the British Library, and the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (as a condition for receiving a travel bursary from them). I made it very clear that they were free to withdraw at any time and if there was anything they said in the interview that they wanted to amend, add or delete then I would oblige. I stored recordings and transcripts electronically. There were copies on my laptop, which required a password for access, backed

up and encrypted on a USB drive and encrypted cloud storage.

It was also reassuring for some of my participants that I had acquired a research permit. This was thanks to IfPO in Damascus. It was not strictly necessary at the time - other researchers had managed without one - but it gave me peace of mind. One researcher from a British university, also looking at Iraqi refugee issues but without a permit, was deported by the Syrian government and not told why. We will never know if lack of a permit was the reason. The welfare of the Iraqis I knew was a paramount concern. I wanted to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to myself but still behave openly so as not to arouse suspicion that my activities were seditious. Deportation would have been disruptive for me but deportation to Iraq for the Iraqis I knew could have been lethal. Fortunately I had finished collecting the narratives before the anti-government protest movement began.¹⁶ Syria is a police state and its society was permeated by networks of informers and undercover security officers.

Looking back, I may have been *too* careful and maybe could have collected more interviews in my sample. Several months into the protest movement there was a demonstration outside the UNHCR. Afghan refugees were protesting against their treatment by UNHCR - perhaps its resources had been earmarked for Iraqis - and had established a small camp. Some had stitched their lips together in protest. Syrian police officers were close by but while I was there the Afghan camp wasn't shot at, suggesting that the government tolerated protests that did not conflict with its interests. Nevertheless, the potential risk to myself and participants was always on my mind, even if it may not have always been one in reality.

I did not interview participants twice. On two occasions participants had a lot to say and we needed two sessions to complete the interview. There is evidence which shows the benefits of secondary interviews for memory recall (Cameron, 2010: 495-496): individuals can remember more about an event when asked about it a second time. The memory seeking process continues, even subconsciously, after the initial attempts at recall. Recall is also affected by the participant trying to please the interviewer by remembering more about events which the interviewer wants to know about (ibid.). However, the relative mobility of the Iraqis I knew made this impractical. Many left Syria before I did, to locations as far away as the United States and Canada. Some returned to Iraq. I would not have been able to

¹⁶ See ICG (2011a, 2011b) for more details about the origins of the protest movement and the government's brutal response to it.

consistently interview my participants twice.

Here there were also ethical considerations. I was asking Iraqis to speak in depth about distressing events: some of the people I spoke to had had relatives kidnapped and close friends killed. I was reluctant to insist on asking them to speak in depth about these incidents twice. Many Iraqis in Syria also suffer from interview fatigue. They have already had to relate their stories to bureaucrats at the UNHCR who are often indifferent to their circumstances and in some cases the Iraqis I spoke to had been interviewed by other researchers. However, I was still able to gather very rich testimonies with single interviews because of the quality of the relationships I established with most of my participants, and other issues outlined above.

From oral to textual: transcription

I recorded all but three of the interviews. Two of those were at the participants' request. I took notes in English and Arabic as they spoke. Another interview took place unexpectedly, hence I was not carrying my Dictaphone with me and could not record it. Most of the interviews were in Iraqi Arabic. When translating Iraqi Arabic into English, I tried to find the words in English that best conveyed the meaning as I understood it, remembering as much as I could the interaction of the interview, and listening to the audio again to replenish my sense of the interaction. The translation was not just from Arabic into English, but from human interaction into text. I also wanted to translate the fluency of their stories from oral to textual form. I deliberately avoided noting the non-verbal forms of communication in the transcripts, as well as verbal fillers, because they can create an impression that the participant is inarticulate. In the transcripts, and the extracts included in the thesis, I have included my questions and interjections in acknowledgement that these narratives are co-constructed.¹⁷ I did not include non-lexical elements or non verbal communications. My focus is on the told and not on the form of the telling so this would not have represented a good use of time. I avoided organising the transcripts into “thematic stanzas, or meaning units” as this would also erase part of the process of co-construction in the narrative (Riessman, 2008a: 35).¹⁸ Nevertheless, the transcripts reflected my inclination towards a thematic analysis with a conceptually guided focus on the content – itself a co-construction based on my open-ended interview questions.

¹⁷ My contributions appear in italics.

¹⁸ See Riessman (2008a: 21-50) for an evaluation of different ways of constructing narrative texts for inquiry.

Conclusion

I have discussed how I view the narratives of displacement that I gathered. They are partial recollections influenced by the moment of telling and by the immediate and broader context but grounded in important material realities. They are influenced by temporal factors. Narratives change over time as well as with different social settings. But the intimate and causative nature of the connection between Iraqis' presence in Syria and their reasons for leaving Iraq made Syria an apt place to conduct the research – or so it was before the anti-government protests and uprising began. Syria was also a place where Iraqis were encouraged to remember their displacement experiences and where some were not allowed to forget them. I was able to collect the rich stories that appear in this thesis through different relationships of exchange facilitated by the different networks in Syria that were seeking to assist displaced Iraqis. That was how I collected the stories that form the coming chapters of this thesis. In the next chapter I provide a historical context to the circumstances that led to mass displacement in Iraq.

Chapter 3

Historical background to mass displacement in Iraq

The invasion and occupation of Iraq did not immediately produce a mass exodus across national borders. Mass movements would take place later as a result of communal and generalised violence following the collapse of the Iraqi state and its re-formation along ethno-sectarian lines thanks to the policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and exiled politicians. These dynamics were unleashed on a population which had already endured the pressures of living under a dictatorship that had dragged them into years of war and international isolation. Those years had produced their own set of refugees. The years after 2003 would produce many more and on a national scale. How did this situation come to be? Here I shall present a compressed history of the events which led to the international embargo of Iraq, the occupation in 2003, to state collapse and the generalised and communal violence of 2006-2007 – the situation in which my participants undertook their decisions to migrate.

The chapter examines international and regional circumstances which led to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, sanctions and the 1991 uprisings. It begins with the background to the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. The eight year war ended in 1988, putting the Iraqi regime in a vulnerable domestic and international situation. It wrongly believed that an invasion of Kuwait would be a solution to its woes: in fact the consequences were disastrous. I look at the sectarian discourse employed by the regime during the Iran-Iraq war and how it was affected by the uprisings of 1991. The regime had used discourse with anti-Shia sectarian undertones in the 1980s in response to the challenges against its legitimacy presented by revolutionary Iran. But after the uprisings of 1991 it began to use anti-Shia discourse more overtly. Here I show how a religious revival during the sanctions era affected sectarian cleavages in society.

I also look at the situation in Iraq after 2003 and how it was connected to domestic and external dynamics of the 1990s. Sectarian politicians and the invading armies pursued communal agendas, purging members perceived to belong to the old order. Their task had been made easier by developments in the 1990s. After 2003, communal violence became commonplace as armed groups including Al Qaida and the Mehdi Army vied for control of

territory and assets. The combination of these armed groups, occupation forces, and a weak state with no political solution to the political and security crisis that engulfed Iraq after 2003 resulted in a “State of Violence” during 2006-2007. These dynamics created a situation of intense insecurity, one which resulted in mass displacement.

There is a dearth of academic research on domestic socio-political developments in Iraq during the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s, though there are many studies centred on Saddam Hussein and Iraqi foreign policy. Conducting research is difficult in countries under dictatorial rule - as I learned from conducting this study in Syria - and Iraq under Saddam was no exception. This state of affairs continued after 2003 because of the deteriorating security situation. Like all histories, this chapter is only a partial narrative. Here, a few well-informed sources feature strongly in my account of social trends in Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s: research conducted by Haddad (2011), Harling (2010, 2011) and the International Crisis Group (ICG). Harling spent a considerable amount of time in Iraq from 1998 to 2004 and as the director of the Iraq-Syria-Lebanon Project for the ICG, can also draw upon extensive field-work in Iraq. Haddad has attempted to put sectarian conflict in Iraq into a historical context and draws upon extensive interviews with Iraqis in the process. I have deliberately avoided explanations of sectarian conflict which rely on the idea of centuries-old animosity between “the Sunnis” and “the Shias” as I believe a nuanced approach is needed which takes into account the policies of the Iraqi state as well as regional and international developments. Broadly speaking, the sources I have used in this chapter adopt this approach in their research.

How Iraq became a pariah state: war with Iran and the invasion of Kuwait

Mohammed Reza Shah, an oppressive monarch who ruled Iran and owed his power to a clandestine Anglo-American coup in 1953¹, was deposed by the 1979 Revolution. He had positioned himself as the regional gendarme guarding against communism – and thus guarding American interests - in the oil rich Gulf. He recycled Iran's petrodollars into arms purchases from the United States and maintained a close alliance with Israel (Hinnebusch, 2003: 190-192). There was popular domestic resentment against his subservience to western interests and to the oppressive practices of the Shah's security forces. A broad coalition of

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Christopher de Bellaigue's (2012) *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Very British Coup* is the biography of Muhammad Mossadegh and the most recent treatment of the coup which deposed him.

Iranians overthrew the Shah, radically altering Iranian foreign policy orientation in the process (ibid.).

Ayatollah Khomeini became the leader of the Revolution and came to power after living in exile. The ideology of the revolution had been anti-imperialism fused with populist Shia Islam. Revolutionary fervour at home influenced Iranian policy abroad (Hinnebusch, 2003: 190-196). Iran cancelled \$9 billion worth of Western arms contracts in 1980 and declared it would instead use its petrodollars for internal development (ibid.). Revolutionary ideology heavily influenced Iran's foreign policy elites in the early stages of the revolution. They began calling for Muslims across the region to revolt against client regimes of the West - such as Saudi Arabia – a challenge to the regional status quo (ibid.).

Hinnebusch explains that the seizure of the American Embassy in Iran, after the Shah was given refuge in the United States, led to Iran's international isolation and enabled Iraq to attack Iran without international condemnation (ibid.). Iran had also rejected an offer of protection from the USSR and warned it not to attempt to play Cold War politics in Iran (Menashri, 1990 in Hinnebusch, 2003). Exporting the revolution became a tactic for domestic legitimisation and to counter Iran's growing isolation but it was unsuccessful. Arab states in the Gulf had sizeable disenfranchised Shia populations which Iran attempted to prompt into rebellion. This, however, only served to unite those states against Iran (Hinnebusch, 2003: 190-196). Exporting the revolution, it was feared, could also have destabilising effects on Iraq with its large Shia population.² The United States looked to Saddam Hussein to challenge the Islamic Republic. Saddam foolishly indulged in a cycle of provocation and counter provocation with Iran (Hinnebusch, 2003: 195) which led to an eight year war at immense human and material cost to both countries.

Iraqi soldiers invaded Iran in September 1980. Bill and Springborg (1994: 385-395) comment that the Iranian revolutionary regime was faltering under domestic and international challenges when Iraq invaded. The war served to consolidate the revolution and Iraq was on the defensive by 1983 as Iran attempted to push into Iraq believing it could win the war and destroy Saddam's regime. That was why Khomeini rejected the chance to negotiate a peace that year (Bill and Springborg, 1994: 386). The conflict continued for five more years and

² This fear proved to be unfounded as Iraq's Shias fought alongside their compatriots during the Iran-Iraq war.

became one of attrition that was increasingly internationalised, with the superpowers siding with Saddam. Billions of dollars of military assistance poured into Iraq, mostly from the USSR and the United States, but also from Britain and France. Iran grudgingly accepted a ceasefire after Iraq acquired chemical weapons which it was able to fit to long-range missiles capable of reaching Tehran by 1988 (Bill and Springborg, 1994: 386-387).

The war crippled the Iraqi economy. Iraq's financial position had been \$35 billion in the black in 1980 but was \$75 billion in the red in 1988 - most owed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Bill and Springborg, 1994: 386). In the wake of the war, Saddam Hussein faced huge domestic economic challenges which soon led him to the desperate measure of invading Kuwait. His regime suffered from a shortage of funds to keep the wheels of patronage turning in Iraq's subsidised consumption-oriented economy. There was potential for resentment against a leader who appeared incompetent rather than heroic (Tripp, 2002: 250-251). The “economic liberalisation process” remarks Tripp (2002:251) “that had begun before the war was extended and reinforced, at least on the statute book”. But this process only benefited a tight circle of cronies close to the ruling circle and could not make any serious dent in the country's overall economic predicament. The debt burden was over 50 per cent of Iraq's oil income in 1990, reconstruction costs were massive, and Iraq's import bill far exceeded its projected oil income³ – itself in decline because of weak oil prices (ibid.). Riots directed at Egyptian migrant workers took place in 1989 after 200,000 soldiers were demobilised (Davis, 2005: 229). Desperate times would shortly result in a desperate gamble.

The Iraqi state was of a type too weak to overcome the fiscal crisis it brought upon itself after 1988. It is worth considering the Iraqi state in the context of Ayubi's analysis of Arab states (1994: 447-458)⁴. It was a mixture of what Ayubi (1994) calls the “hard” and “fierce” types of state rather than a “strong” state able to penetrate society and organise social relations through hegemonic persuasion. It was “hard” in the sense that it was strongly centralising and relied on administrative instruments – a huge and complex bureaucracy⁵ - to try to penetrate civil

³ Iraq's oil income in 1988 was \$11billion, half of what it was in 1980 (Tripp, 2002: 248).

⁴ His central thesis is that the strength of Arab states vis a vis their societies is overstated in the sense that they rely on a blend of resource allocation (obtained from external rents) and raw coercion – ruling through intermediaries and corporatism. They suffer from hegemony deficits which make them incapable of implementing many of the laws they pass and of extracting taxes. They are also overstated in the sense that they are overstaffed. See Ayubi (1994).

⁵ The Iraqi state under Saddam had developed an elaborate network of surveillance, terror, and patronage. A web of complex bureaucracy made it difficult for members to operate beyond their assigned roles, the fulfilment of which was enforced by disciplinary procedures (Tripp, 2002: 248).

society and control the economy. But it was also a “fierce” state because of its capacity and will to use raw coercion to discipline civil society when its members did not conform to its will. Therefore it proved not to be a “strong” state: it was shaken by a fiscal crisis from 1988 but was unable to extract taxes directly from the population. Taxation can lead to increased political awareness and demands for participation, something the regime wanted to avoid. This was a sign of its incapacity to implement laws and real social change. Its capacity to mobilise people – such as for war against Iran - depended on a combination of resource allocation through patronage networks and a use of raw coercion. Without the oil wealth to continue its ambitious programmes of infrastructural development, to lubricate the wheels of patronage that had bought the acquiescence of the population, and which funded the enormous bureaucracy and security apparatus, Saddam gambled.

Iraq's leader sought to persuade OPEC to raise the price of oil with new restrictive quotas and looked to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular for help in lifting Iraq out of its economic plight (Tripp, 2002: 251-252). They were expected to cooperate in raising oil prices by restraining their own production and pressuring others to do the same. Saddam repeatedly asked them to declare that \$40 billion in financial assistance they had provided during the war to be a loan and not a debt. He also asked that they should make substantial contributions to Iraq's economic reconstruction. They refused and Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 after making threatening hints earlier that year. Saddam had calculated that Kuwait could be used as a bargaining chip to dominate the Gulf states more generally and the conquest would enhance Saddam's authority at home. He had calculated wrongly that the United States and Western countries would take their lead from the Gulf states and would acquiesce in the negotiated outcome of the Iraqi engineered crisis (Tripp, 2002: 252). It seems that the Iraqi leader had also taken the words of American Ambassador to Iraq⁶, April Glaspie, that the United States had no interest in the border dispute with Kuwait (Bill and Springborg, 1994: 389), to be a green light for the invasion.

Defeat and the 1991 uprisings

Unlike in the war with Iran, there was no support forthcoming from regional or international powers. It turned Iraq into a pariah state: its people had to endure a protracted international embargo. The United States led an international military coalition which overwhelmingly

⁶ Spoken in a controversial meeting between Saddam Hussein and his Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on July 25th 1990 (Bill and Springborg, 1994: 389).

defeated Iraqi military forces, expelling them from Kuwait within a few weeks (Davis, 2005: 227). Bombing destroyed much of Iraq's power and transport infrastructure and its industrial capacity was reduced to 1960s levels. Diseases spread as sewage and water treatment facilities were damaged (ibid.). Iraqi Army units mutinied in Basra on February 28th 1991. The uprising spread across the south of the country and soon 16 of Iraq's 18 provinces were out of the regime's control. However, it managed to crush the uprising by April and only three northern provinces, comprising the Kurdish areas of Iraq, remained out of its control (ibid.).

The regime then turned its attention to crushing the Kurdish uprisings, sending mechanised units of the Republican Guard to do the job with the support of air power. The rebels were not capable of confronting this technology which was used against civilians as well as armed rebels. A mass exodus of Kurds into Turkey and Iran ensued (McDowall, 2000: 372-373). No-fly zones were subsequently established and enforced in northern and southern Iraq by American, British and French fighter jets.⁷ This created a “safe haven” and many Kurds were able to return. The Baghdad government blockaded the Kurdish areas which soon fell under the control of the rival Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), with international assistance. This region saw further conflict between the rival factions, parts of northern Iraq becoming an autonomous Kurdish area from which attempts to topple Saddam were launched (McDowall, 2000).

Sanctions

Sanctions were imposed under the authority of the United Nations after the Iraqi invasion and remained in place until 2003. They caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, destroyed the nation's economy and its education and health care systems, and reduced a “sophisticated country” to the level of “the poorest of the poor” (Gordon 2010: 87). Policies of the United States were “extreme and harsh... going well beyond the mandate of the Security Council's resolutions” (Gordon 2010: 235). The Iraqi people would bear the cost of American efforts to weaken and depose the regime in Baghdad. The American government showed overt hostility towards it and was committed to a policy of isolation and replacement – preferably by coup and not popular uprising (Allawi, 2007: 50). The Iraqi government was able to mitigate the effects of the embargo but was unable to avoid a human catastrophe (Gordon 2010: 127–30).

⁷ France withdrew from enforcing the no-fly zones in 1996.



Figure 7: Sanctions made it difficult to acquire spare parts for cars in Iraq. By 2001 a flow of relatively new cars had begun to appear in Baghdad, imported from Dubai but most Iraqis had to improvise with pre-1990 models.

Measures to increase food production, together with a national system of rationing, prevented famine and the regime encouraged expansion of private health care to compensate in part for the collapse of state provision. There was an emergency reconstruction programme to restore electricity, water and telecommunications services damaged in the 1991 bombing campaign (Gordon 2010: 130). However, these were not enough. The state was unable to deal effectively with the changed circumstances (Gordon 2010: 132–33).

The Iran-Iraq war and anti-Shia state discourse

A propaganda war accompanied the Iranian revolution and the military conflict between Iran and Iraq. Bengio (1998) has analysed Ba'athist discourse and shows how it evolved to take on more Islamic tones after the war began. One reason for this was that “Iran made religion its main weapon for maligning Ba'thist Iraq, proclaiming it a heretical regime” (Bengio, 1998: 180). The Iranian revolution polarised opinions beyond Iraq. In the Islamic world it resulted in the mobilisation of sectarian identity as regimes which felt threatened by it, Gulf Arab monarchies in particular, sought to discredit the revolution in any way possible (Haddad, 2011: 12-13). Targeting Shi'ism, the creed of the revolution, was one way of doing so. There was a concerted anti-Shia discourse in the post-1979 Gulf Arab media landscape. Anti-Iranian polemics became anti-Shia polemics (Al-Mu'min, 2007 in Haddad, 2011:13) thus politicising Shia identity in a way that emphasised its otherness, with damaging consequences for Sunni-

Shia relations. There was a cyclical dynamic involved – the increased salience of one particular identity led to a heightened awareness of sectarian identity across the sects (Haddad, 2011:13).

Saddam produced a specific historical narrative to cast suspicion on the Shia population of Iraq during the war with Iran. The Ba'ath argued implicitly that the Arabised Shia of Persian origin – the *Shu'ubiyun* - who had formed the core of the Abbasid empire's bureaucracy – in the 8th century CE - had conspired to bring its downfall (Davis, 2005:4). The implicit message to contemporary Iraqi Sunni Arabs was that Shias were untrustworthy. To Iraqi Shias the message was that they would only receive the benefits distributed by the state if they would embrace Pan-Arabism (ibid.). This polemic originally appeared in a pamphlet in 1962 but was reprinted in 1980 and continued to appear in regime propaganda throughout the 1980s. Saddam alleged that Iraq's Shia community harboured disloyalty and ill intent towards the Iraqi nation throughout history (Davis, 2005: 131-133, 184-188).

After the 1991 uprisings

The regime chose to interpret the 1991 uprisings through a communal prism, calling the violence a “Shia” act of treason. It made official and entrenched a sectarian narrative which reflected only one aspect of the revolt (Harling, 2011: 46). Davis (2005) highlights a series of seven articles issued in the name of the Ba'ath Party in its newspaper *Athawra*⁸ in 1991. They formed the regime's first attempt at dealing with the outcomes of the Gulf War and the intifada. They were anonymously written but, according to Davis (2005: 242, 343), most analysts believed they had been penned by Saddam Hussein himself. They addressed issues including the nature of Iraqi collective identity, using the word Shia in a political sense and publicly so for the first time – a major change in Iraqi political discourse. Iraq's other minorities, the Kurds and Turkmen, were also targeted in the series (Davis, 2005: 242).

Saddam's articles were aimed primarily at the Shias and paralleled Western analysts who viewed Iraq through an ethnic lens. In one article titled *Criticism of the Iraqi People – The Impact of Iranian Sectarianism*, the chaos and destruction of the uprisings were the fault of the Iraqi people who were not united or disciplined enough to counter this sectarianism and the Shias were viewed as its cornerstone (Davis, 2005: 243). Continuing his approach from the 1980s, the Iraqi leader was trying, says Davis, to “divide and conquer” (ibid.). Then,

⁸ Meaning *The Revolution*.

Saddam had tried to sow divisions between secular Shias and the clerical *Marja'iyah* class who he connected to the Iranian revolution. In the 1990s Saddam attempted to separate respectable religious Shias on the one hand from lower-class elements whom he asserted originated from the marshlands in southern Iraq bordering Iran on the other hand - implying it was through the marshlands that Iranian culture infiltrated Iraqi society⁹ (ibid.). He labelled them as sexual deviants, misogynists, and dishonest in their business dealings, with a moral culture not conforming to the high standards of Islam. "Saddam argued that these people are much in evidence in Baghdad, as itinerant pedallers, street vendors, and petty merchants ... " (Davis, 2005: 243). The broad denigration of Shias was present in state media which pushed the idea in the 1990s of the "mob provinces" - those where rebellions took place - and the "white provinces" where they did not. People with origins in these provinces were labelled as *Shurugi* - a term meaning a person from the east, i.e. the south eastern part of Iraq bordering Iran but which after 1991 acquired a pejorative meaning: an uncultured person. Discrimination towards many people from the southern provinces ensued (Haddad, 2011: 102).

Haddad (2011:65-85) explains how political, geographical and other circumstances led the 1991 uprising to be seen as a Shia rebellion. The rebellion itself spread quickly in the nine southern provinces that had Shia majorities where the state had been weakened the most, being closest to the Saudi and Kuwaiti border areas where Iraqi military units had been routed. It was also through the southern provinces that dishevelled Iraqi soldiers retreated and thus where people could see first hand the humiliating extent of the defeat. Some had walked from Kuwait after being abandoned by the central command of Baghdad, and after American bombers targeted columns of retreating Iraqi army units. Retreating armoured units began attacking Ba'ath headquarters and other regime structures and symbols. In these provinces some assertion of exclusive Shia identity were purportedly made. These included displays of posters of Iraqi Shia clerics like Ayatollah Abu Qasim Al Khoei (the highest authority in Shia Islam at the time) but also posters of Iran's then dead ruler Ayatollah Khomeini (though this was more likely for their value as anti-regime symbols) and also the use of Shia slogans. All of these circumstances made it easy for the regime to persuade Iraqis in the provinces of western Iraq (most of whom were Sunni Arabs and from where many of the regime's members came) that an Iranian backed Shia Islamic rebellion was taking place (Haddad,

⁹ He would later order the draining of the entire Iraqi marshlands, approximately 20,000km².

2011: 65-85).

The manner in which the regime crushed the rebellion gave the appearance of a deliberate attack on Iraq's Shias. Holy shrines in Najaf and Kerbala were targeted - seen as an intentional violation of Shia symbols – and the notion that as they suppressed the rebellion, the Iraqi Republican Guard carried the slogan “No more Shias after today” gained wide currency¹⁰. The result was to alienate them from the state and to galvanise Shia identity (Haddad, 2011:73). The way in which the 1991 uprising was suppressed, says Haddad (2011), served to nourish a deep sense of victimhood among the Shias during the 1990s whereas Sunni Iraqis, broadly speaking viewed the rebellion with scepticism believing that Iran played a pivotal role. The result was an irreconcilable memory of the events on sectarian lines that would create a division between Sunnis and Shias (ibid.).

... the memory of the uprisings was not in and of itself the cause of embittered sectarian relations in the 1990s; rather, the dismal economic situation soured social relations on a number of levels, one of which was the sectarian cleavage ... (Haddad, 2011: 107).

In the deprivation of the sanctions era there was a religious revival in Iraq at the societal and state level. The revival was not dissimilar to developments in Arab states more generally. Islamist movements were gaining ground in a climate in which ruling pan-Arabists were discredited and oppositional ones marginalised (Karawan, 1992: 448). Karawan (1992: 448) remarks that in the 1990s, certain pan-Arabists adopted “the language and the banner of Islam”. There had been a legacy of Islamic activism in Iraq but the greater factor was arguably the need for assurance and support in a time of social and economic crisis – people mobilised religion as the state could no longer provide the jobs and social services that were available before the embargo (Haddad, 2011: 106-108). The regime had used religious language in its discourse in the past (Bengio, 1998) - what differed about this religious revival was its very visible and public nature (Haddad, 2011: 103-112). The state here was a “cultural compass” in that it was following society – which began to mobilise religious resources - as much as it was leading it by mobilising religion in order to regain a semblance of legitimacy. It embarked upon the National Faith Campaign (NFC) in 1994, increasing Islamic classes in

¹⁰ The damage done to the shrines was visible though the Republican Guard's slogans were impossible to verify. Haddad states that many Iraqi Shia nonetheless believed that the slogans had been widely used (Haddad, 2011: 73).

school, building mosques, banning the sale of alcohol in public places, and adding the phrase *Allahu Akbar* to the national flag.¹¹ The campaign and the funding for it was under the control of the Ministry of Religious Endowments. This was, however, a Sunni institution and so the NFC took on a character of Sunni Islam, further distancing Shias from the state (Haddad, 2011: 112)¹².

Although the religious revival was not inherently sectarian, it resulted in a heightened sense of religious group belonging. Haddad (2011:105-112) argues that the more devout a person becomes, the more s/he needs to refer to religious rulings and therefore the greater awareness becomes of differences between different religious schools of interpretation. A heightened sense of the validity of one's own religious affiliation is concomitant with awareness of divisions between sects more broadly. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence from visitors to Iraq in the 1990s of overt displays of piety in Iraqi society - a marked increase in the number of women wearing head scarves for example. These displays were clear markers of self definition and group identity (ibid.). The 1990s saw a strong sense of social identity appear among the Shia which took on quasi-ethnic qualities for an increasing number of them. It was the result of “the increased disconnect from the state, rising piety and the shift to religious modes of self identification” (Haddad, 2011: 111).

The Sadrists

It was in this environment of deprivation and religious revival that the social base of the Sadrists grew. After 2003, Sadr City in east Baghdad became a stronghold of the movement and its militia, which was responsible for much of the violence and displacement in the capital.¹³ Sadr City (formerly “Saddam City” and “Revolution City”) had its origins in migrations to the capital of landless peasants from southern Iraq (Batatu, 2004: 134): by 1986 it accounted for more than a quarter of the city’s population, many still living in Baghdad’s worst slums (Batatu, 1986: 182–84). The public transport system did not extend to Saddam City, water was scarce and residents had very low standards of education. People of the area suffered particularly badly under the international embargo. Further migration from southern provinces ensued in the 1990s thanks to the regime’s policy of draining the marshes, and new

¹¹ This phrase means “God is the greatest” and was penned in Saddam Hussein's handwriting.

¹² Haddad quotes this fact from an interview with Nasir al-Samarrai in Amman, November 2008.

¹³ The Sadrists were also a force in Basra and the south of Iraq but this study is concerned with their activities in Baghdad.



Figure 8 (above): A poster of Muqtada As-Sadr in Sayidda Zaineb, 2009.

Muhammad Sadiq As Sadr is pictured to his left.



Campaign posters of Nuri Al Maliki (Figure 9: left) and Ayaad Allawi (Figure 10: right) on display in Damascus.

Iraqi parliamentary elections took place in March 2010 and Iraqis could vote at polling booths in Syria.

waves of rural migrants merged with previous ones (Harling, 2010: 14–15).¹⁴ After 2003 it was renamed Sadr City, in honour of Muhammad Baqir As-Sadr and Muhammad Sadiq As-Sadr, both politically active Shia clerics murdered by Saddam's regime in 1980 and 1999, respectively. The Ba'thists thought that Sadiq could become an accommodating Shia leader and from 1993 he was given regime support. He adopted a defiant stand, however, attacking the regime and the quietist clerical elite, and advocating a more vocal and militant approach against the injustices faced by Iraq's impoverished Shias. With an ascetic lifestyle, and genuine eagerness to listen to the latter's concerns, he stood out from the traditional clerical elite. He soon led an authentic social movement, bringing to the fore a deep split within Iraqi Shia politics (ICG, 2006c: 3–6). The Sadrists led by Muqtada As-Sadr after 2003, says Harling (2010, 2011), were the only post-2003 political group with any real social base.¹⁵ The rest were returning exiles who had spent the 1990s abroad lobbying the governments of the United States and UK to remove Saddam Hussein by military means.

Developments abroad: the role of Iraqi exiles in the 1990s.

During the 1990s, exile politicians attempted to organise themselves and discuss what a post-Saddam Iraq might look like. In 1992, with American support, opposition figures held conferences in Vienna and in Salahuddin in northern Iraq. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) was formed and would spend the next decade hammering out a structure for a future Iraq. Controversially it was committed to allocating leadership positions on a communal basis – a Sunni, a Kurd, and a Shia were on its tripartite executive council. Ahmad Chalabi was the chair of this council. He was a wealthy Iraqi exile banker whose family had been prominent in commercial and political life during the Iraqi monarchy (Allawi, 2007:40-53). The other exile opposition group was the Iraqi National Accord (INA) headed by Ayad Allawi and formed in 1990 with the help of western intelligence agencies. He was a former Ba'athist who had commanded a unit in the notorious National Guard and later cultivated relations with the CIA and MI6 (ibid.). Both these movements had their credibility weakened when their struggles against the regime failed in the mid-1990s (Vanderbusch, 2009: 293). The INC failed to topple the regime with a military insurrection in 1995, with the assistance of the CIA and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Stansfield, 2007: 144-145). In 1996 the INA, again with support

¹⁴ The Baghdad quarters of Shu'la, Fadhila and Washash are similarly places where Sadrists have strong support.

¹⁵ This is with exception to the Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK, who were allocated positions in the post-Saddam government.

of the CIA, failed in its coup attempt – all the army officers plotting against the Iraqi regime were rounded up by Iraqi security forces and few survived (Stansfield, 2007: 146).

One of the most powerful exile groups was the Supreme Council (SC), a Shia Islamist group.¹⁶ It suffered from a legitimacy deficit inside Iraq, stemming in part from its close relationship with Iran. It was formed there during the Iran–Iraq war with the aim of overthrowing the Ba'thist regime and establishing an Islamic theocracy in Iraq. After the 2003 invasion it succeeded in convincing credulous American officials of its influence in Shia communities: Visser (2008: 32) comments on a startling success in “exploiting the predilections of western governments for an ethno-sectarian reading of Iraqi society”. The SC may have been aware of a more assertive Shia identity forming in 1990s Iraq but before 2002 it had opposed this reading because of the potential harm that identity politics could cause there. The leader of the SC rejected an invitation to be the Shia representative for the exile conferences in 1992 because the communal allocations they had proposed would enshrine “sectarian divisions and national division” (Ra'uf, 2000, in Visser, 2008: 38). In 2002, the SC broke away from this view and was rewarded with “sectarian spoils at the opposition conferences during the run-up to the 2003 invasion and in government in Iraq after the fall of the Ba'athist regime” (Visser, 2008: 38-39).

The Iraqi opposition in exile, particularly the INC and Ahmad Chalabi, lobbied for western intervention to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The relationship of the INC and the INA with Bill Clinton's administration was strained. With George W. Bush becoming president in 2001, and the events of September 11th that same year, the prospects for the success of their lobbying improved dramatically. The American Neo-Conservatives had themselves advocated a more aggressive American policy to deal with Saddam Hussein. The exile lobbyists saw an opportunity to convince the American government and public of the need to invade Iraq and remove Saddam from power (Vanderbusch, 2009: 294). Some representatives of the INC:

worked almost from inside the government with like-minded officials to promote a specific policy. That relationship was of considerable mutual benefit—the exiles got funding, legitimacy, and the likelihood of influence over post-Saddam Iraq; and the presumed

¹⁶ The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was also known as the Supreme Assembly for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. It changed its name in 2007 to the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq and is therefore referred to in this article as The Supreme Council (SC). See ICG (2007) and Faleh Jabar (2003) for comprehensive details of the SC.

expertise of the exiles lent support or even authenticity to the claims made by that group of government policy makers (ibid.).

They argued that invasion was necessary to remove Saddam Hussein because he was a threat to the United States, and that the Iraqi people would welcome the freedom and democracy that would come with his removal. Opponents of the war were labelled naïve and lacking compassion for, and confidence in, the Iraqi people (ibid.). During the two years following September 11th 2001, Bush and three key senior officials made 935 false statements in the campaign to sell the war (Lewis and Reading-Smith, 2008, and McClellan, 2008 in Vanderbusch, 2009: 304). They were successful in their deception and on March 19th 2003, on the pretext of disarming Saddam Hussein's alleged chemical and nuclear weapons arsenal, the American led invasion and occupation of Iraq began.

Invasion and occupation

In 2003 the richest and militarily most powerful state worldwide invaded another state it had spent years enfeebling. During the long build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 there were many predictions that military conflict would immediately produce a refugee crisis.¹⁷ In fact, few Iraqis would decide to leave Iraq as a result of war in 2003. Many chose to make temporary migrations away from Baghdad to escape the bombing, and we shall hear from them in Chapter 4.

The first large scale episode of displacement took place in 2004 with the American assaults on Fallujah. Ahmed Mansour (2009), one of the few unembedded journalists in the city, has written of the immense destruction brought upon it by American forces. Heavy weaponry and air power were used on a densely populated urban area. The city was encircled and put under siege. Mansour (2009: 316-325) notes that between 4,000 and 6,000 civilians were estimated to have been killed in the assault and some 36,000 homes (from 50,000), 60 schools, and 65 mosques and shrines were destroyed by American forces. Sewer, electrical, and communication systems were also destroyed. Some 900 shops and factories were seriously damaged or obliterated (ibid.). Eye witness accounts, from civilians as well as American Marines, told of the use of White Phosphorous (ibid.). Many Iraqis from Fallujah and the province of Anbar fled to Baghdad to escape the American offensives across the province. Many established make-shift camps in squalid conditions in the capital – some of my

¹⁷ For an account of both warnings and preparations for mass displacement see Marfleet (2007).

participants told me that Baghdadis assisted them with modest supplies of food, water and clothes.

The heavy handedness of the American military has been linked by Niva (2008) to cooperation with the Israeli military. Tactics modelled on the Israeli assault on Jenin in 2002 were seen in Fallujah in 2004 and across Iraq.

... American forces frequently adopted a new set of tactics that appeared to have come straight out of the Israeli playbook from the occupied Palestinians territories, including physically enclosing villages within razor-wire fences, bulldozing homes of suspected insurgents, destroying irrigation systems and agricultural fields, taking civilian hostages and using torture to extract intelligence. Underlying the new strategy was the conviction that only a tougher approach would quell the insurgency and that the new strategy must not only punish the insurgents but also make clear to ordinary Iraqis the cost of not cooperating (Niva, 2009: 72).

The strategy of course failed and only in 2007, when a change of tactics accompanied an augmentation of troop numbers in the “Surge” did the United States achieve some success in counterinsurgency (ICG, 2008). From 2003-2007, American forces would continue to use the brutal Israeli approach. But it was not the ferociousness of American forces that would directly lead to mass displacement. Displacement and forced migration on a mass scale would occur as an outcome of processes initiated after the invasion by the United States and its appointees in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Within weeks of the invasion they had introduced radical reforms. For decades Iraq had been a one-party state; the Ba’ath was the only legal party and membership was crucial to career chances with the country’s biggest employers: the state bureaucracy; state agencies and welfare services, and state-owned corporations, commercial and industrial enterprises. CPA Order Number 1, *De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society*, “disestablished” the Ba’th Party, removing its senior members from all state bodies. CPA Order Number 2, *Dissolution of Entities*, dissolved the armed forces and many state bodies including the ministries of defence, military affairs and information, rendering some 350,000 people jobless without compensation (Marfleet 2007: 405).

Vast numbers of Iraqis deemed to belong to the old order were instantly marginalized and

entire communities reliant on income from the state were thrown into crisis. At the same time, a campaign of retribution received semi-formal backing from CPA officials, who gave a “green light” to looting of state resources and to attacks on the intelligentsia of the Ba’thist era – members of professional, academic and technical networks including educators, doctors, engineers, journalists, writers and artists.

State properties including schools, colleges, technical institutes, university campuses, depots, ministries and military bases were looted openly, sometimes with American troops standing by (Chandrasekaran 2007). Thousands of people were attacked at their homes or workplaces; there were countless abductions, kidnappings and disappearances, many perpetrated by plain-clothes gangs whose activities recalled the reign of terror favoured by Central American regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile the CPA pursued policies of abrupt economic change that made millions of people much more insecure (Klein 2004, 2007; Marfleet 2007). In 2004 widespread displacement began as both fear and insecurity spread rapidly. In 2005, as restructuring of the state gathered pace on the basis of ethno-religious agendas, which prompted the intensification of communalist hostilities, the crisis became systemic. Reconstruction of Iraq soon detached millions of people from their homes.

Targeting the old order

Among the first to take flight were those with senior positions in the former state. Belonging to the old order, they were seen as obstacles by those whom Chatelard (2012) refers to as “would-be state actors”. These aspired to control the emerging state and wished to shape its formation to their benefit. The Supreme Council, mentioned earlier, benefited hugely from the occupation. The SC took over a reformed Interior Ministry, its military arm the Badr Organization (formerly the Badr Corps, *Faylaq Badr*) assuming control of police commando units. There was soon a steep increase in killings of Sunni Iraqis that could not be explained as counter-insurgency. Men dressed in police or military uniforms carried out night raids in Sunni areas, seizing men later found in secret detention centres or in mortuaries, their bodies bearing evidence of torture. The Badr Brigades were widely suspected of carrying out these attacks. Meanwhile special police units believed by many Iraqis to be composed of Badr members became death squads implicated in attacks on people associated with the old regime (ICG 2006b: 3, 17–18). The International Crisis Group notes that “Assassinations multiplied

of former regime elements, as well as of senior officers in the old army and pilots who had flown in the Iran-Iraq war” (ICG 2007: 13). Shias were not immune if they were deemed to belong to the old order.

The post-invasion landscape was desolate: state institutions had been thoroughly looted and there were no viable “internal” political parties. When exiled politicians returned they discovered that they had no significant social base. Having failed to articulate an ideological vision in the diaspora during the 1990s they now faced a crisis of credibility (Harling, 2010: 2). Jabar noted that Shia exile movements were already focused on what they saw as a window of opportunity offered by the invasion to “reshape the political order and ultimately Islamize power and/or redress communal grievances” (2003: 18). In this situation, he warned, “a communal-based politics, or an Iranian type of fundamentalist-authoritarian rule would trigger Sunni fundamentalist responses, risk a communal cleavage and threaten secularism” (2003: 21). Sectarian politics, endorsed by the occupation authorities, allowed former exiles to compensate for their status as outsiders (Harling 2010: 3). Eventually they were rewarded by control over key government resources, so that after the April 2005 national election (the first since the invasion) “sectarian logic began to dictate the staffing and work of new ministries. Most became party fiefdoms, first and foremost” (ICG 2006b: 19).

Towards mass displacement

Between 2003 and the election of April 2005 there were numerous suicide attacks in Shia areas, almost certainly the work of Sunni cells, notably *Tandhim al-Qa’ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*/al-Qa’ida’s Organization in Mesopotamia and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*/Partisans of the Sunna Army (ICG 2006b: 2). Shia leaders argued publicly for restraint, urging support for electoral activity which they believed would shortly secure them a large majority. When the April 2005 poll brought victory for the Shia-Kurdish alliance, together with much wider access to institutions of the state, the picture changed dramatically, with a steep increase in killings of Sunnis involving death squads often believed to involve police or men in military uniform. There was promptly “an alarming descent into sectarian discourse and violence” (ICG 2006b: 3). All sides used increasingly inflammatory rhetoric, attacking mosques, seizing individuals and groups based on real or imagined ethno-religious affiliation, and compelling mass exit from towns and neighbourhoods.

The Mehdi Army, the militia of the Sadrists, played a huge role in coercing people to leave their homes in Baghdad. This was particularly true after the bombing of the Al Askari shrine in Samarra in February 2006 which it used as a cue to run amok in the city on an ugly rampage seizing material resources and strategic assets (Harling, 2011: 48, 50). Today's Sadrists are lead by Muqtada As-Sadr, the heir to Muhammad Sadiq Sadr (or Sadr II) who was murdered by Saddam's regime in 1999. Muqtada was at first dismissed and excluded from the political process by American officials, who soon had to acknowledge the reality of the Sadrists' strength after deadly clashes with his followers. The Sadr movement had deep roots but its material assets were scant. Unlike the SC, it had not aligned with a foreign sponsor, receiving only limited support from Iran. Its followers, traditionally disenfranchised, saw Muqtada as a spokesman who contested their marginalization within the emerging political order (ICG 2006c: i). Some also benefited directly from their engagement with the Mehdi Army. Sadiq had centralized assets, redistributing them in clientelist fashion; Muqtada, with limited resources, operated a system that "allow[ed] his followers to take direct possession of whatever resources they can acquire – a far more fluid leadership style in which he directs less than he referees and adjudicates" (ICG 2006c: 18–19). The Mehdi Army was undisciplined and difficult to manage, with Muqtada "unable to prevent a steady flow of dissent and disorder at all levels" (IGC 2006c: 20).

During the worst days of conflict in 2006 and 2007, their militiamen damaged the movement's popular base with brutal acts of sectarian plunder and killing, seriously affecting its claims to be part of a nationalist movement. Its heavy involvement in the violence became a valuable source of revenue: it profited from selling protection to merchants and from the assassination of Sunnis (ICG 2008a: 6). After February 2006, the Mehdi Army launched a systematic sectarian-cleansing assault on confessionally mixed and middle class neighbourhoods in Baghdad (Harling, 2011: 49). Although the different factions enjoyed a large amount of autonomy, their activities followed a cohesive pattern: they would set up local offices to assure residents that they would defend the area, and encourage them to set up vigilante groups. They also provided displaced Shias from other quarters with accommodation and tapped into their knowledge of the neighbourhoods they had left in order to mount retaliatory raids (Harling, 2011: 50). Many people were kidnapped or killed (or both) and the militia occupied and retained properties for its own purposes. Its activities contributed substantially to the generalization of fear and to mass displacement.

Throughout the cleansing process, these factions enjoyed the aloofness of U.S. forces, the passivity of the national army, the complicity of the local police, and the blessing of the Shi'i ruling elite, who reportedly contributed to the effort by pointedly depriving Sunni neighbourhoods of much needed public services (Harling, 2011: 50).

The new sectarian-oriented setting left Iraq's Sunnis devoid of credible political representation. The United States supported the SC and Kurdish political groups directly.¹⁸ The occupation took more antagonizing forms in predominantly Sunni areas, further marginalizing them. Sunni Arab political identity could only organize itself underground in radical opposition to the emerging political order. Many of Iraq's despairing Sunni youth then joined these clandestine movements including Al Qa'ida, the Islamic Army of Iraq and other small groups (Harling 2010: 11–12; ICG 2006a: 2–3).¹⁹ ICG comments on the implications for displacement:

Al-Qaeda in Iraq's methods were excessively brutal, its goal being to fuel ever-intensifying sectarian strife, fear and instability. It systematically targeted Shiite civilians, killed police officers and other civil servants and even coerced Sunni civilians to the point where most were forced to flee. (ICG 2008b: 17)

Al Qa'ida's methods isolated them from the other Sunni groups. It desired continuous conflict and disorder, seeking to take the battle to apocalyptic levels. Armed groups across ethno-religious communities had a different but also brutal rationale, seeking to acquire and hold key positions in the urban landscape. They combined a will to commit horrific acts against civilians with a sometimes "sophisticated understanding of the socio-economic factors at play" to engage in systematic sectarian 'cleansing' (Harling 2010: 17–18). Meanwhile, they catered deftly to the needs of those displaced from other neighbourhoods.

¹⁸ American Special Forces were also implicated in numerous sectarian attacks carried out by militias operating as part of state security agencies (Ismael and Fuller 2008). Both of the SC and Kurdish political groups espoused "victim narratives": blame for their past suffering was apportioned to Iraq's Sunni Arabs for their alleged collective support for Saddam's regime (Harling 2010).

¹⁹ By 2006 the initially disparate groups became coherent and confident, united against the occupiers and Shia militias. Later, the bulk of the Sunni Arab insurgency eventually turned against al Qaida Iraq and personal and ideological rivalries put an end to the unity (ICG 2008b: 16).

A State of Violence

Violence peaked in 2006 and 2007 after the attack on a sacred Shia symbol, the Al Askari shrine in Samarra in February 2006. These conflicts have commonly been referred to as a civil war but this description, suggests Harling (2011), is an inadequate term for the events of 2006-2007. The interplay of military occupation, state collapse, sectarian politics and lawlessness combined to create a “state of violence” in distinction to a “state of law” (Harling, 2011). The Iraqi state after 2003 was unable to “provide peaceful mechanisms for addressing political conflicts, to form a common frame of reference, and to enforce its monopoly over the use and legitimization of violence” (Harling, 2011: 45). Three interrelated processes conspired to create this situation of generalized insecurity: an exclusionary post-2003 political process; sectarian differentiation; and the privatisation of violence: gangs, militias, mercenaries and insurgent groups filled the security vacuum caused by state collapse (Harling, 2011: 45-48).

It is worth stating what the privatisation of violence entailed as I have already discussed sectarian differentiation and the political process which excluded Iraq's Sunnis. The vacuum left in place of the collapsed state in 2003 allowed gangs, criminal networks, private contractors and insurgent groups to flourish. The American response to this security crisis was to produce ever-larger contingents of armed men, all of them with loyalties to different political factions of a highly polarised political elite (Harling, 2011: 47). The aim was to increase the coercive capacities of the nascent central government and therefore, it was hoped, stability would return. But the vetting and training was hurried and the oversight mechanisms were deficient. Accordingly, the emerging security apparatus was itself privatised: its members showed loyalty to special interests far more than to an elusive common cause. “Typically, at least up to 2007, civilians perceived their behaviour much in the same light as that of the other armed elements within society – arbitrary and opaque” (Harling, 2011: 48). “Symptomatically, civilians often expressed their confusion at the identity and purpose of the perpetrators, although these forms of violence more often than not cut right through neighborhood, professional, and kinship relations, and rested on an intimate proximity with the victims” (Harling, 2011: 44). Baghdad was engulfed by a battle for control and conquest by different armed groups hailing from a limited number of strongholds (Harling, 2011: 55). Many of these strongholds were deprived areas containing many underprivileged young men from the city's underclass (Harling, 2011: 49). The neighbourhoods where the Mehdi Army

was strongest were typical examples of this. In a state of violence, these men were able to seek fulfilment and empowerment by joining an armed group like the Mehdi Army (ibid.). Moreover, violence was not just a response to marginalisation, but also a means of social ascension as, Harling (2011: 58) comments:

Unable to legitimate their rule, returning exiles strove to enforce it. Former regime officials, despondent and denied a future, mobilized to challenge them. Militias and armed groups recruited within the capital's underclass and among its desolate youth. Interestingly, in many cases self-made commanders were themselves ousted by even more wretched outcasts, such as teenagers and petty criminals, as ruthlessness increasingly became the primary factor of success.

In this environment it was not only sectarian “cleansing” that took place, but “class cleansing” too (Harling, 2011: 58). Indeed, much of the sectarian cleansing could be understood better as an attack on the middle classes:

Local “notables” (e.g. doctors) were not only kidnapped for ransom, but also assassinated for no other discernible reason than their mere status. Teachers and intellectuals particularly came under attack. Shop owners and entrepreneurs were racketeered and pressured to the point of hampering business (Harling, 2011: 58).

The capital's middle class was targeted systematically. Most of them were members of the state-employed professional ranks who lived in open residential areas that were difficult to defend and lacked social cohesion – they were prey for armed groups who easily depopulated these areas (Harling, 2011: 55-56). The loss of this qualified and relatively progressive population, “both the product and the basis of a modern state”, may not have been the most visible phenomenon of the descent into a state of violence, but it may be the one with the most lasting consequences for the future of Iraq ...” (Harling, 2011: 59).

From mid 2007 some of the militias were “partly routed or collapsed under their own weight as a result of self-consuming dynamics”: Baghdad's new confessionally unmixed social make up has since been frozen into place by a network of blast walls (Harling, 2011: 59). The network of walls has formalised sectarian divisions and means that Iraqis who fled the

violence will have only a network of walled homogeneous enclaves to return to, if they ever do (Niva, 2008: 76). The “Surge”, an American plan to return security to the country by increasing troops and applying a shift in counterinsurgency strategy, was relatively and surprisingly successful considering the odds (ICG, 2008c). These were, however, a series of tactical victories – calming very violent areas such as Anbar province and several Baghdad neighbourhoods – rather than the success of an overarching strategy for Iraq. As the ICG (2008c: i) warns: “...what remains is an enduring source of violence and instability that could be revived should political progress lag ...” .

Conclusion

Iraqi society has been undergoing a profound transformation, one which began decades ago. Iraqi politics has shifted towards communalism and is mobilising according to sect and ethnicity, a change from the ideological politics of the past. New patterns and new rules have been emerging (Stansfield, 2007: 196, 204): “These new rules are those of communalization, identity based politics, chauvinism, religious exclusivism and ethnically based nationalism” (ibid.). Whether these new patterns are permanent or not is still unclear. What is clear is that the process of putting them in place has been central to understanding mass displacement in Iraq today (Marfleet, 2011a: 177). Mass displacement and forced migration took place in a climate of generalised and palpable threat. For many of my participants, their social life was permeated by threats. They appeared in a number of spaces in their lives, aggregating pressures as armed groups fought for control of physical spaces, turning them into sites of intense conflict. When so many threats are present in daily life people are compelled to take drastic action such as moving house or leaving the country. These decisions are made after a threshold point is reached whereby certain baselines, as I explained in Chapter 1, are challenged. The baseline is socially constructed and based on perception. It can also be socially adjusted - threatened by armed actors vying for control of assets and territory, and authority over the population living in that territory. In a state of violence, threats appear in multiple spaces in people's lives and are related to the processes described above of armed conflict and state transformation. Such violence also produces a communal-wide and society-wide apprehension of threat. Many people were able to endure these violent circumstances for some time – indeed many people did not - perhaps could not - leave. But aggregate pressures of living in a state of violence can push people to a threshold point which is understood as a

threat to survival. Here the norms of protection have gone and the environment is one of imminent threat. We shall now hear from Iraqis who experienced these changes first hand.

Chapter 4

State Collapse, State Transformation and Displacement

This chapter addresses the experiences of those specifically targeted by the emerging new order in the wake of the collapse of the Iraqi state in 2003. These groups were targeted by occupation forces and by the emerging new regime which began to purge the old one and its symbols. The experiences of people who had been high ranking administrators in state institutions and former military officers are discussed here. They appear to have been perceived as the embodiment of the collapsed state and the former Ba'athi regime. Gardner (2012: 28) observes that the state is not only conceived of as apparatuses, laws and bureaucracies, but also as “a configuration of powers *inseparable*¹ from the embodiment in individual citizens.” They were directly targeted after the state collapsed and a new order began to emerge from it. They were victims of statecraft, discussed earlier as the craft of state-building (Soguk, 1999). State transformation was not only a professed intention of the occupiers but also a strong driver of displacement. Changes involved in the construction or the reconfiguration of a nation state may entail abolition of an old regime. Zolberg notes that “entire social strata may come to be viewed as obstacles” during the course of these events (1983: 30–31). Typically there are “successive refoundings... each of which may result in a refugee-generating crisis” (Zolberg 1983: 30–31). The people most affected by this process in the early phase of the occupation were those who had been, or were perceived to have been, part of the “old order”. As I explained in Chapter 1, the United States and its appointees in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) initiated radical reforms that left hundreds of thousands of people in economic insecurity.

Other groups were also displaced by statecraft. Palestinian refugees who had been in Iraq since 1948 became easy targets for a weak nascent state that wished to make a show of strength to hide its weakness. As I show, their displacement bore the markings of statecraft. They were another group which were perceived to be embodiments of the former state and were thus directly targeted by the new order emerging from the collapse of the old one. The Mandaeans also suffered and I discuss their experiences here too. The post-2003 state was being formed along ethno-sectarian lines in a way which they felt deliberately excluded them

¹ Emphasis in original.

from the “new Iraq”. Processes of exclusion began which for them, like many other Iraqis, compounded pressures they had endured in the Saddam era resulting in their displacement and eventually in their forced migration.

I also present the experiences of others whose displacements began in the early stages of the transformation of the Iraqi state – or regime change as it was referred to more commonly. They include the migration to Syria of one man under pressure from his family, and in anticipation of the imminent bombing campaign. I also discovered that families made temporary journeys away from Baghdad to places in Iraq where extended family members lived. This was also in anticipation of a fierce bombing campaign which they rightly expected would concentrate on Baghdad and other major cities. There was a calculation of risk in all of the decisions taken, preceded by an acute monitoring of their surroundings. There was also evidence of cumulative causation: the decisions of others to leave affected those who remained and who had not yet decided to leave, changing their surroundings in a way that added to the growing pressures on them to do so. Two families in this chapter left Baghdad because they could see that everyone else was leaving. In one case the neighbourhood was virtually empty, only a few families remained on the street as people fled Baghdad. The unsettling feeling of being amongst the last families left on the street acted as a coercive pressure and those in the household who could leave did so until the occupation was complete. They returned to their neighbourhoods to find them in a very different condition to when they had left.

Leaving Iraq because of the invasion?

Expectations of mass migration from Iraq were high in 2003. When the Anglo-American led coalition invaded, they subjected the country to aerial bombing on a colossal scale. The “shock and awe” doctrine was the guiding principle of the bombing and Baghdad was given special attention. In 2003 the whole country awaited the dangers of an intense aerial bombardment. Death and fire could rain from the skies at any moment. Buildings could collapse and send shock waves and shards of glass indiscriminately into the flesh of those unfortunate enough to be nearby. These dangers would be further intensified with potential house-to-house fighting in urban areas. It seemed clear that the population was facing a choice between leaving the country to avoid the dangers of war, or remaining to risk being

killed. There were expectations of threat-induced mass migration. Emergency camps were set up to deal with an anticipated million refugees (Chatty, 2011: 7). UNHCR believed that refugees would be filling up the border camps they had set up in neighbouring countries but was mistaken. “No substantial movements” were reported across Iraq’s international borders in March 2003, and only “small numbers” were “trickling into Jordan and Syria” in April (UNHCR, 2003a, 2003b). UNHCR even began preparing to supervise refugee returns and reintegration before changing their policy statements in 2004 owing to general insecurity in the country (Marfleet, 2007: 406).

Of all the Iraqis I interviewed, only one left before the invasion. Majeed was under pressure from his parents and brother to leave Iraq with his pregnant wife before the war started. He had already lost a brother in the Iran-Iraq war and his parents believed that his life would be in danger in Iraq. He had worked in a Baghdad printing press near his home for years but left Iraq on March 11th 2003.

Do you remember the day that you left Iraq?

Yes, I remember, how can I not remember? Things were tense, they were making preparations, putting black oil on the bridges.² They were expecting an attack, it was imminent. ... Nine days before Baghdad was hit, I left.

What was on your mind before you left? Did you leave in fear of the bombing?

Yes, of course, from fear of the war. My mother urged me to go, to leave. My brother, the martyr, she didn't just love him she worshipped him. He also had a really high esteem for her, it was unusual. So we used to listen to the news and see what was going on around us. So my mother was afraid for me and used to say “go, don't stay here”, even my brothers were urging me to go. This is a photo of my brother, the one who was martyred in the war with Iran [shows me his photo]. He was 28 years old when he died, he was young.

The preparations for war in Baghdad, when did they start? When did you sense that there

² This is a reference to the oil fires lit by the Iraqi army in an attempt to disrupt the advanced guidance systems of the American Air Force. They were thought to have been oil pools created from pipelines. See Reed (2003) <http://www.geotimes.org/may03/geophen.html>. Images by Bruno Stevens can be seen here: <http://bruno.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/Iraq-2003-During-the-War/G0000cVnrF4iOWSk/I0000Myey3e0Idrs> ; http://bruno.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/Iraq-2003-During-the-War/G0000cVnrF4iOWSk/I0000hBCKWf_vOpw .

was definitely going to be a war?

It was in the news, you know, someone was coming every day to meet our “friend” who was there before.

Our friend?

Yes.

You mean Saddam?

Yes, Saddam [we both laugh]. Yes, they were coming to meet him at the time. We would see the news on TV, a person could know everything. You could know too from what was happening around us, you could see the general situation too. You know, like I told you the preparations for war. It was these things. They were getting ready, preparing for a strike, an attack. So during that period, I left.

Did you see more soldiers on the streets?

No, no. It was the Popular Army, not soldiers.

Majeed and his family monitored their surroundings and official news broadcasts and became certain that there would be a war. Majeed spoke of pestering more than persuasion on the part of his family. He resisted until one brother, resident in Australia, confirmed he would begin a visa application for Majeed and his wife as soon as he got hold of a valid passport and arrived in Syria. Majeed was reluctant to leave Iraq because he had twice used the smuggler route in the 1990s but failed to go beyond Turkey.

I had tired of it. The exhaustion and anxiety, not knowing where you're going, the uncertainty. I didn't like the smuggling method. I tried it twice, not just once. Once I went, and after a month, I was sent back, I stayed in our village in the north of Iraq. Then I went again a second time. I didn't like the smugglers' route, it is scary. Then I went back to Baghdad.

Majeed told me that had his brother not offered to begin the Australian visa application, he would not have left Iraq in 2003. He did not know that he would still be in Syria seven years and 11 rejected visa applications later. Yet return to Iraq is an unpalatable option. His parents still discourage him because of the poor security situation and unreliable public services, and he does not want to return until “it goes back to how it was before”. He is still waiting for a chance to resettle to a third country. Majeed is a working class Iraqi with no assets in

Baghdad, such as an apartment to return to, and his lack of assets limits his mobility. He cannot afford to return to Iraq because of steep rises in living costs and high unemployment rates - his wife has since given birth to two children which means that living in his parents house in Baghdad is not an option because his sister's family lives there too. Even if he changed his mind about the smuggler route he would not be able to afford the thousands of dollars that smugglers charge. He has been stranded in Syria since 2003.

Temporary migrations from Baghdad

So was there any kind of exodus before the invasion? Yes, but not as UNHCR had expected. There was an exodus from Baghdad. Mohsin, Najma, and Farah left Baghdad temporarily, to rural locations where they had family connections. Anwar's mother and sisters left too, but he and his father remained to guard their home and because of his father's military commitments. These temporary migration experiences, lasting two months at the most, were examples of people escaping the threat of bombing and invasion. Their experiences all reveal something interesting about how the decisions were made.

Mohsin was still a teenager in 2003, but remembered how his family monitored their surroundings:

We sensed that things were changing in Iraq, the streets were changing, security were everywhere, the police were everywhere. People who had retired were being called up by the state, people like my father. They called him up and told him that he had to be ready to return in any emergency situation. Things were changing, we realised there was going to be a war, 100%, even though we were cut off from the media. There was nothing you could call[reliable] media in Iraq. Even on television they would show you things that were far removed from the world.

An uncle living in Germany played a key role in their temporary flight away from the threat of war. He telephoned insisting that they “go on a trip” and take some other families with them. His uncle owned agricultural land near Ramadi, west of Baghdad. Once they had received the money he had sent, they set off with those other families, taking food and provisions with them. They spent around 20 days there while his father remained in Baghdad,

returning only after the invasion was complete.

At the time, people in Baghdad were leaving for the provinces. The streets were empty.

People were going to Mosul, Anbar, to the south, to Basra, any place but Baghdad.

... On the bus we rode, the passengers were all women and children, and some young men.

There were no older men because they had all remained in Baghdad. Some stayed to guard their homes, others because they had been called up by the army.

Anwar made similar observations and his family's decision to leave Baghdad was affected greatly by cumulative causation.

We started seeing trucks on a lot of roads and they were carrying belongings, furniture, clothes, and they were leaving. The highways that led out of Baghdad were full of cars carrying their belongings. We started seeing people leave, our neighbours too. ... I had to stay in Baghdad because I wanted to keep watch over the house, our belongings, furniture, our money. We couldn't just leave it because the neighbourhood was nearly empty. There were maybe three or four families left in the street from a total of 50 or so houses. ... Those were people who didn't have anyone outside Baghdad, they didn't know where to go. The rest of the houses were either empty, or there was maybe one person in the house, a young man. ... When my parents saw that all of the neighbours had gone, they started saying that they couldn't stay there alone, they had to leave too.

At first they had not wanted to leave but the decisions of others played a coercive role. The empty neighbourhood had an unsettling effect on his mother and sisters. They stayed with relatives in Salah Ad Din province north of Baghdad for two months, arriving unannounced. They remained in frequent contact by telephone with Anwar and returned after Saddam's regime fell and Anwar could see that their neighbourhood had become "calm and peaceful". His father, like many others, had been ordered to remain in the city to perform military duties, despite being in his mid-50s and only ever attaining a low rank.

Farah and her family similarly made a trip to her family's village of origin in the north of Iraq. She remembers a crowded bus station, it was packed and it seemed as though everyone wanted to get on a bus out of Baghdad. The decision was made very quickly by the adults in

the family, she was a teenager at the time. Farah explained that close relatives came to her home where they met and argued about what to do. Her father and two uncles insisted on staying in Baghdad to guard their homes. Her mother thought it was a bad idea for the men to stay but they did so anyway. A day before the war began, she left for northern Iraq where she would spend 40 days with her family. The day the war began, her father and uncles changed their minds and set off with a neighbour to rejoin them in the north.

Farah's trip also included an element of cumulative causation. She remembered a hastily planned trip affected by the departure of others.

It was just happening very fast. We didn't know, the day before we didn't know we were travelling. And then suddenly everyone decided to travel because everyone was doing it, and it's safer there. We knew the reason, it was pretty dangerous [staying in Baghdad during the bombing], and we have to go, but we didn't know how dangerous it was.

Najma too left with her parents for Al Qadisiya province in southern Iraq where her maternal grandmother owned farmland. They left two days before the war began. Her uncle was influential in the decision - he followed the news more than her father did and expected it to be a very rough war. He advised them to leave and they spent a month in Al Qadisiya but returned in April after the initial phase of the war was over.

The threat of bombing and invasion was enough to trigger temporary migrations away from Baghdad, whose residents correctly expected it to be intensely targeted by coalition bombs and missiles. In the case of Anwar and Farah, the flight of others affected their families' course of action, suggesting that cumulative causation played a coercive role in these early migrations. The decisions were all made amongst close family members and they were all monitoring their surroundings before making the calculation to leave. Although the women were consulted in the decisions, they did not hold the greater sway in these cases. None of them expressed an intention to remain in the provincial areas of refuge. All of them expressed a desire to return to Baghdad once it was deemed safe to do so by relatives who had remained in the city. Majeed was the exception - he left Iraq altogether under pressure from his parents and brother. But he did so reluctantly and only after expectations were raised of a permanent migration to Australia to join his brother. Had this option not been available to him it is

unlikely he would have left for Syria in 2003. He had in fact spent several weeks with his sister in Ba'quba, north east of Baghdad, to escape the heavy bombing in 1991 and may have done the same again in 2003 had it not been for the Australia option.

Military occupation and displacement

Abu Waleed was born in Baghdad in the 1950s. He is a Palestinian whose family fled Palestine in 1948 and became refugees in Baghdad. He was living in the Karraada district of the capital. He took his wife and three children to stay with his sister when the American army reached nearby Jadiriya. There they occupied a compound belonging to the University of Baghdad and the Republican Palace on April 7th. His sister lived in the Baladiyat residential compound alongside many other Palestinian families. Abu Waleed recalled the small arms fire resistance that the American army encountered when they reached the main street of the Baladiyat compound. They responded with tank and artillery fire, and then with air strikes.

The people were in a state of hysteria. Around the compound there were maybe 8,000 Palestinians living there. There was a kind of hysteria I had never seen before, it was something new. The people living in the compound all the families, the children, the elderly, got out of the compound on foot. They wandered around the streets and the alleyways, and the houses. Their Iraqi brothers opened their doors to their neighbours and people they knew. Iraqis lived in the houses around the compound. They knew the Palestinians well and took them in.

With his sister's family, some more relatives and other families they knew from the compound, they left for his maternal cousin's house. There were five families huddled in the house that evening, dangerously close to Baladiyat but they survived. The next morning they returned to the compound where around a dozen apartments had been destroyed. Abu Waleed did not leave Iraq until 2006. He and his family returned to his Karraada apartment four days later to find that "life was almost normal but the situation had totally changed". We shall return to his story later to see how.

In addition to the deaths, injuries and destruction of military operations, the occupation of Iraq disrupted people's lives in other ways. The collapse of the state and the looting of the

country's public institutions also came with a collapse in public services, a climate of insecurity, and economic upheaval. The security situation immediately after the fall of Saddam's regime varied between different areas of Baghdad and of the country overall, but the general picture was one of decline which reached a nadir from early 2006 until late 2007. The state had been responsible for providing basic services such as electricity and water supplies, the ordering of traffic and law enforcement. Although its capacity to do so had been weakened during 13 years of a harsh international blockade, Baghdadis for example could still expect electricity from the national grid. Mohsin's neighbourhood would expect from four to six hours a day of power cuts before 2003, but would only get two hour's worth of electricity from the national grid post-2003. Mobility was affected too. The climate of insecurity led people to gradually make less and less outings after dark. The growing number of checkpoints, concrete blast barriers and dividing walls in the city increased journey times significantly for many people in the city, and this in turn was exacerbated by the reported increase in the number of new cars coming into the country.

Najma was shocked after she returned to Baghdad from Qadisiya.

We were going back because we thought that we would go back to our normal lives. But we found something else when we went back. We even thought we should have stayed there for a while but that while wouldn't have changed anything. That's how the situation was. We entered Baghdad and found the oil wells were all bombed, and smoke everywhere.³ Baghdad surrounded by smoke that reached the clouds. American Hummers⁴ and soldiers were in the streets. We were really hurt that we were back to our city and lives only to find them not the same. Many people had been killed. Everything was changed, life changed tremendously.

There was no security. None. No one would go out after sunset. After we were back after the war, there was no going out at night at all. There was no electricity; it was a whole month till we got some electricity.

The collapse of security and public services were crucial issues. Shaykh Rami was not in Iraq

³ This is also a reference to the oil fires lit by the Iraqi army. They were not oil wells but oil pools as mentioned in footnote no.1.

⁴ The Humvee, or Hummer, is a multi-purpose wheeled vehicle used by the American Army, and can weigh over 4 tonnes. <http://www.army.mil/factfiles/equipment/wheeled/hmmwv.html>

on the day the regime fell but was in contact with relatives in Baghdad.

I heard from my brothers who were there and my parents also. There were so many robberies going on, they were afraid to open the gate and look out onto the street. The killings, the gangs were killing each other. ... On the day of the Fall [of the regime], my sister told me that she would look out of the window and be afraid. She would look out of the window and be afraid from what was going on in the street. We lived close to Muthanna airport. Cars were stored there [which belonged to the office of the former president].

After the robbery and looting finished, after the Fall, what was life like?

It didn't finish, it grew worse! After the Fall, it was not safe, there was no security. ... The disturbances increased, they didn't decrease.

It was in this climate of insecurity that the targeting of those perceived to belong to the old order began. The International Crisis Group observed that “Assassinations multiplied of former regime elements, as well as of senior officers in the old army and pilots who had flown in the Iran-Iraq war” (ICG 2007: 13).

Purging the old order

One such man was Sayf, from the South of Iraq. He worked as an assistant to a senior figure in the state owned energy sector. He was a Ba’th Party member, as was his wife, who held a senior position in the Student Union closely associated with Uday Saddam Hussein. Both lost their jobs in 2003 because of de-Ba’athification: neither was compensated or given any form of pension but both hoped to remain in the country. When their house was attacked and burned, and in the light of attacks on other Ba’th members, Sayf left directly for Syria. His wife stayed in a safe house in his home town until he was able to make a visit to Baghdad; there they met and left again for Syria where they have remained.

Abu S was a director in the Ministry of Health, also from a southern Iraqi province. He had worked in the ministry for many years before assuming responsibility for managing a provincial blood bank and immunization scheme. In April 2004, men who he believed were

Badr militia attacked his home while he and his family were inside, using rifles and other light weapons. They escaped to a neighbour's house, eventually moving to another location a few streets away. That house was subsequently attacked and the family had to stay with relatives elsewhere in the province but they too were threatened. A note was left at their home saying "you are looking after wanted people". Abu S and his family moved to Baghdad to find safety.

Abu S and Sayf were both high ranking officials in the state administration – well known and highly visible. Were they attacked because they were symbols of the old order, ones that aspiring state actors wished to purge with their militias, like the Badr brigade? Were they attacked purely out of retribution, for their association with a regime that was deeply unpopular? Both of these suggestions may be true and are not mutually exclusive. They were not in a position to find out, only to flee or be killed. What is clear is the relationship between their forced migrations and state formation. The collapse of the old regime removed the protection they previously enjoyed, and the emergence of a new order, in similar ways to the examples of Europe cited by Soguk (1999) and Zolberg (1983), was accompanied by a purge of the old.

Sara, a pilot's daughter

Sara, whose late father was a retired colonel in the Iraqi Air Force, also left Iraq in 2004. She told me that he had received elite pilot training in France and served in the Iran–Iraq war. He had also been a victim of regime violence when in the early 1990s he turned down a request to join the intelligence services and received third-degree burns as a result of a car bomb. In 2004, the family received threatening messages from the Badr Brigade. However, Sara explained that it was not until they were shown a hit list with her father's name on it that they left the country:

My father's name was number three on the list. It was a list of I think over 50 persons who were working in the military. They said that he'd dropped bombs on Qom and Tehran in Iran... This list was brought to us by some guy who knows them, who has some contacts within the militia. This guy said, "you have to leave, it's serious. Your name is the third on this list. Look at it".

The “guy” had married the daughter of a close friend of Sara’s mother and wanted to help her family by giving them time to flee the danger.⁵ After her father saw the list he telephoned three friends whose names he also recognized in order to warn them. The family soon left for Syria. In a typical story Sara relates the complexities of their departure and the tragedies associated with it. First, her father and brother went to her aunt’s home in Al Adhamiya, a Sunni neighbourhood off-limits to Shia militias. After six days Sara and the family set off for Syria, her father learning that most of the people he knew on that list had indeed been killed. Later her father mysteriously disappeared on his way to Baghdad with a friend during a trip to complete paperwork relating to his pension.

Hassan from Kerbala

Threats were not aimed exclusively at those with high positions, or in fact any positions. Hassan, a Shia from Kerbala, left Iraq for Syria also believing that he was a victim of the Badr Brigades. They had wrongly believed he had been working for the former regime. He explained that Kerbala was politically “one of the black provinces” because of the uprisings there against Saddam Hussein in 1991.⁶ He had initially left Iraq in 1998 because of the poor economic situation resulting from international sanctions, returning before the invasion in 2002.

Before the Fall [of Saddam’s regime], graduates of Tourism and Hotel Management⁷ would all go and work for the Iraqi intelligence services. But us, coming from the “black” provinces, we weren’t allowed to work in the intelligence services at all. After the fall, people came with an agenda but without experience. So when someone comes to apply for a job and they see that he is a Tourism graduate, they’re sure he worked for the former regime. You can explain it to him, show him the evidence, that you left Iraq before the fall, that you are from *this* province, that you are from *this* family, that your brother and cousin were executed by the former regime, and then he’ll leave you alone. But he’ll get you in a different way. He won’t allow you to get a government job. ...

⁵ This incident echoes forced migrations in the previous regime. It is common in the stories of Iraqis, who left before the fall of Saddam’s regime, to hear of a friend with contacts in the security services who warns them of an imminent arrest in time to flee.

⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁷ Either from a university or a technical institute.

The threats come in different ways. Perhaps someone will come to you and ask if you belong to a certain political movement. If not, then you can't get the post. After a while, maybe you'll find a way to get the job, through a connection somehow. Then someone will come and tell you that the boss belongs to the so and so party. If you start working for him, he may do something to you and your family.

Then comes the message... I got a telephone call. They said "you've applied for this post and you're a graduate of tourism. We can spread slander about you – that you used to work in a certain place, so forget about your degree". I really was afraid.

The "certain place" of work meant the intelligence services of the former regime, a dangerous association in Kerbala after 2003. The Badr Brigade had been actively pursuing graduates of Tourism. After hearing about this phone call his father told him to leave immediately. He left for Baghdad to stay with his sister but the security situation there was becoming worse.

By 3pm people would be hiding in their homes, so where would I be able to work? People from Baghdad were leaving. That was in 2004. So I had to leave... I could see that my sister and her sons wanted to get away as well. Then the Sunni-Shia issue started and my sister said she was going to return to Kerbala... Going to Damascus was the only way to safety.

His forced migration to Baghdad, and then to Syria, were the final phases of a disruption to his life that began with the occupation itself. This was a process in which pressures built up that constrained his daily life, his capability to function as he chose. It was not only a restriction on his freedom to generate income in the profession that he had chosen, but also constraints on very basic capabilities to function. Access to medicine he needed was restricted because of the security situation, basic public services were not being provided by the state, and other economic opportunities to generate income had been monopolised by "outsiders" with little interest in the welfare of the citizens of Kerbala. The personal threat was the final act in a series of increases in pressure that led to his forced migration.

Hassan spoke of the difference between the Kerbala he left in 1998 and the one he found in 2002.

It was better politically in Iraq in 2002 [than it was in 1998], there wasn't strong pressure from the security services. Taking this person and that person away. There was a little opening up, even for religious pilgrimages. I was surprised when they said that the situation had changed. In 2002 Saddam Hussein had changed his policy and given people more space. ... I saw a big difference and there was a lot of work around. There was economic activity. I even regretted leaving in 1999, I regretted it. I said, if only I had stayed. The economic situation got better, there was activity. People were able to live, buy cars, build houses. There was a big difference.

After 2003 Kerbala was a different place again.

A lot of things started to change. A lot of people started to think of emigrating. There wasn't any work, there wasn't any electricity. There wasn't any electricity at all immediately after the invasion.

Hassan recalled that there was a manageable, if patchy, electricity supply in 2002. Thursdays and Fridays were days of full supply, to serve the religious pilgrims coming to visit the shrines of the Imams Hussein and Abbas in the city. On other days residents could expect alternating three hour periods of national grid and generator supply. After 2003 people had to rely on generators almost entirely. A household would typically have a small generator of its own and also pay a monthly fee to a person who sold electricity supply to the street from a larger private generator. Hassan explained that after 2003, there was no state to pressure the street generator owners to keep them running.

The security situation, the robberies and killings taking place in the city, made people fear leaving the house after 6pm whereas in 2002 the streets were safe at 2am. Adding to an already bad situation, soldiers from the occupation forces began to enter people's homes in heavy handed ways.

You know in our areas women would be veiled, a soldier can't just enter a home. But soldiers would enter homes, they would search them. In the evenings we were used to sleeping on the roof. They would enter homes straight from the roof. ...

When they enter your home they don't talk to you. It's just "Go! Go!" and they've entered. You can't talk to them because they shoot quickly, he'll shoot you. ... But they would search your house in an insulting way. I think that the Iraqi people were humiliated during this period.

Maybe the aim was to insult the people, insult their values. The decision to leave after the Fall [of the regime] wasn't based on fun or comfort. The situation was bad. Nobody respects you. You are afraid of the police in the street. By police I mean the American or British soldiers. First of all, they don't respect you. Second of all, they make mistakes. Once I saw American soldiers fire on a car, on the road to Baghdad. I saw it with my own eyes. By mistake, their father drove close to the convoy and they fired on the car. When there was an American convoy about the cars would keep their distance, maybe a whole kilometre. You would be afraid.

Hassan's access to important medical supplies which he needed was also disrupted by security problems. Pharmacies no longer opened after 6pm from fear of armed robbery and hospitals were suffering from supply shortages. Even in 2002 at a time of embargo he was able to go to a hospital and receive an injection for his stomach related medical problems. One evening he was extremely sick and in need of an injection but the government hospital did not have the right supplies and the private pharmacies were closed. He remained in pain until 10am the next morning when they opened.

I was not surprised to hear about security and healthcare problems that Hassan mentioned; people in most of the country's provinces were experiencing similar difficulties. I had expected them to be better in Kerbala, as it is a predominantly Shia city which millions of religious pilgrims visit each year. Were things not better there because of this prosperity?

Things are better than in Baghdad in terms of security. ... But the problem is that the pilgrims that come, they want to stay right by the shrines of the Imam Abbas and the Imam Hussein. Around the shrines of Abbas and Hussein are hotels that belong to particular people. I don't want to mention names, we're afraid of things on this earth. They belong to particular people who are profiting, they don't belong to me and to you.

The profits don't go to the citizens of Kerbala. The citizens of Kerbala are like outsiders now to Kerbala. After the invasion there was another invasion – a hidden invasion.⁸ There was a second invasion which bought up the important areas, the important shops, and forced people out. It wasn't a choice. “You have two choices: either I demolish your house, or you sell it to me”. What's the best choice? You sell it to him. When you sell it to him, where do you go after that? You're two or three kilometres away from the shrine. So what will you get out of the pilgrims? Do you get anything? So there was a hidden invasion.

It was a monopoly then?

Of course. That wasn't there before the invasion. It wasn't there. We owned a shop, from 1988, that was maybe ten metres away from the Imam Abbas' shrine. But things are different now, everything's different.

Hassan's family, like many others in Kerbala, were presented with what they believed to be a “throffer”. This, as discussed in more detail earlier, is an offer that contains a threat upon its rejection (Wertheimer, 1987). They were told to sell their business at a good price or watch it be demolished without receiving “good compensation”. Those making the “throffer” said that they intended to clear the space, to create an open area for the sake of the pilgrims. But Hassan said that the demolitions didn't take place, they held on to “the well of gold” that a business close to the shrines is. Certain citizens of Kerbala were being excluded from the wealth that the shrines brought to the city by “outsiders”. It was not even possible to set up a street stall close to the shrine.

Who is going to let you? At the moment the people who are responsible for the running of the Abbas and Hussein shrines are the same people who have bought up all the land around the shrine, all the hotels and the shops. Street stalls are not allowed.

Do they have patrols that check?

Of course. They have around 3000 people working for them.

When did that start?

⁸ The Arabic term he used was *ghazu mubatin* [غزو مبطن].

It all happened after the Fall [of the regime], I think it was 2004. ... It wasn't gradual. It happened quickly, very quickly, in a number of days.

He would not mention by name those who were responsible as he was worried that he would one day have to suffer the consequences if he must return to Kerbala.

According to Hassan, a different type of old order was being displaced in Kerbala, families and clans who he described as the “deep-rooted” and “original” inhabitants of the city. He spoke of it as a second invasion. “Outsiders” were responsible, “scheming people” with huge financial resources. Hoteliers, shop keepers, and others who had long owned businesses close to the shrines were being displaced, their capability to generate income depleted. This happened to Hassan too. As well as being excluded from employment in the state bureaucracy because of a mistaken perception that he worked for the former regime, his family lost their business close to the shrine. His sense of security and ability to access medical services were also drastically affected before his migration to Baghdad, and then finally to Syria. Hassan's final displacement, a forced migration to Syria via Baghdad, like many others I spoke to, was part of a process of disruption. The decision to leave was taken under circumstances of duress in which the decision to remain was made at the increasing expense of what Sen (1999) refers to as instrumental freedoms. When eventually the pressures increased to the point where his life was at risk, his father ordered him to leave Kerbala and stay with his sister in Baghdad, another decision that was taken exclusively by close family members.

Former officers in the armed forces

Abu Bakr was a Major in the Republican Guard, an electronic engineer maintaining databases and computer systems. He was aged 34 in 2003 and thrown into economic insecurity once the CPA had dissolved the Iraqi army. His salary stopped and the emergency grants made available for members of the army were irregularly available and added up to \$100 each. A state teacher's basic monthly salary in Iraq is now around \$500 a month but Abu Bakr's status as a former Republican Guard officer excluded him from the recovering salaries in the state sector. The grants eventually stopped and some officers were lucky enough to receive pensions, but not Abu Bakr. He was without an income for several months, there was no work and he was stuck at home. With his brother and some friends, they set up a small business, repairing and setting up computers. In early 2004 a customer he had befriended helped him to

secure some work as a private sub-contractor for a Kuwaiti company that was itself a subcontractor for American firm General Electric (GE). Abu Bakr described the income as good, but it was temporary work. It ended in the summer of 2007, not long before he left Iraq. Abu Bakr's displacement would be completed in 2007 when sectarian violence in Baghdad reached a gruesome peak.

Adnaan, his brother, was also an officer in the Iraqi Army but in a different section: the special forces. A pragmatic and resourceful individual, as well as a pious Sunni Muslim, he established a Sons of Iraq force made up of former Iraqi Army officers in the Baghdad neighbourhood of Al Ghazaliya in 2007. They worked in coordination with the American Army to fight Al Qaeda and other armed terrorists operating in their neighbourhood. He was a Baghdadi with family roots in Tikrit, but, like many other Baghdadis he expressed conditional support for an American led intervention (ICG, 2002: 2). He had hoped that Iraq under American tutelage would become as prosperous as the Gulf states and that some of the many promises the Americans were making would be realised. The promises were never realised. For Adnaan, the invasion resulted in his immediate unemployment with the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. He never received a pension and had to work in the private sector, as a taxi driver and then briefly with his brother as a private contractor. His move to Al Ghazaliya was necessitated by a threat from Ayad Allawi's political party. Ayad Allawi was an exile politician and the leader of the Iraqi National Accord that opposed Saddam Hussein, returning to Iraq after the occupation. Allawi had worked closely with Western and Arab intelligence organisations (Bremer, 2006). When Adnaan was threatened, Allawi was Prime Minister of the Iraqi Governing Council, a body appointed by the United States before the 2005 national election in Iraq. Adnaan was living in a government owned apartment.

The residential areas that were owned by the government were the first to be targeted for displacement⁹ after the Fall. ... [T]hey wouldn't let us live in the houses that the government had given to us because we were considered to be part of the former regime. ... I received a threat. It came from the Iraqi National Accord movement of Ayad Allawi. They came and set up an office in our residential compound. It was a small compound, six buildings altogether. Each one had 38 flats in it, nine storeys high. They were all artisans

⁹ The Arabic word that appears in Adnaan's story as displacement was *tahjeer* [تهجير], which means to cause to migrate. It is the causative, form two, of the verb *hajara* [هجر] which means to migrate.

and officers. The threats came on the basis that all of the apartments had been distributed to people who were part of the former regime. They started asking around: where is so and so? That question asked in that situation means that they are looking for you. ... So I left the apartment but my family remained.

Who told you they were looking for you?

They came to my family's house and asked about me. Some of the neighbours immediately rode the wave, they immediately signed up for the National Accord and became members. But they were my neighbours. They came and warned my family that they were looking for me because I was an officer and so on, and that I shouldn't show there. They were good boys, looking after me. That I shouldn't show up there, that was the first forced migration.

So I left the apartment. I owned some residential land in Baghdad which I sold. I had a small amount of money and bought a small house with it in Al Ghazaliya and settled there with my family. That was in 2004. I worked as a taxi driver, I had my own car, so I would go out and work, live off what I earned. I had no salary, nothing.

It was not until later that Adnaan had to leave Baghdad and then Iraq altogether. After he set up the Sons of Iraq movement in Ghazaliya, he appeared on the radar again. Once the American Army passed control of the Sons of Iraq patrols to the Iraqi government, Adnaan was targeted again. His home was raided by Iraqi security forces prompting him to leave for Tikrit – his family's town of origin where one of his brothers lived - and then for Syria. But it was in the immediate aftermath of the occupation that his displacement began. He was thrown into immediate economic insecurity, and then compelled to move to a different neighbourhood to evade a threat from one of Iraq's new ruling parties, the new order purging elements of the old one. The rest of his story will continue in the next chapter.

What was also interesting was that he explained the armed resistance to the American occupiers as emerging from a defensive response to a purge under the new regime. Iraqi society, he said, was already equipped for armed resistance, thanks to years of war and military training. But it wasn't enough. They needed leaders, and that is where the officers came in.

I don't want to lie to you. I was amongst the people who was convinced that, with my military background, that the best way to free the country was through armed resistance.

... Soldiers alone are not enough to win a battle. That's where the role of the officers came in to play. They were mostly high ranking officers in the former Iraqi army who were excluded from the new army on the grounds that they were Sunnis or former Ba'athists.

It wasn't just an operation of exclusion, it was a physical purge. They were exposed to attacks, to killing. Eventually they were pushed into the resistance, to defend themselves. The activities broadened and America reached a point where they would have been defeated had it not been for the pressures from the Shia parties and militias that were present.

This targeting of army officers seemed to be happening in Al Adil in Baghdad where Mohsin lived. His father was a retired teacher who used to teach in a Baghdad military university. Their neighbourhood was once quiet and relatively self contained. After 2003 it was the site of frequent and deadly American Army raids. It consisted of three parallel streets, one housed many high ranking war veterans in accommodation granted to them by Saddam Hussein. Mohsin explained that when the American Army came, setting up bases in the city, in schools and other buildings, they welcomed any information they could get about "their enemies". People were encouraged to inform on others in a similar fashion to times under Saddam, and there were no consequences for giving false information.

You could go and tell them that this person has lots of money and he's funding terrorism, things like that. The American army didn't care, they would give you \$100 and you could go. But that house is going to suffer. They'll raid the house at night, arrest the women, the children, the young men. If there was any resistance, even if you tried to escape they would kill you. They've come thinking that you are their enemy. You are their enemy so they're willing to do anything. ... You'll be investigated and then a year later they'll release you, apologise, say sorry, that they have nothing on you, God be with you. This after a year of torture.

Mohsin was very aware of the dangers. Arrest on charges of terrorism would guarantee long

term detention and some torture, whether guilty or not. He heard from other neighbours that soldiers would confiscate documents, ID cards, weapons, gold, jewellery, and anything of value. He heard first hand accounts from some of the families he knew well in the area that the young men had been taken away by American soldiers. It was when the house next door was raided, neighbours who he had grown up with and were as close as family, that Mohsin had to leave.

They arrested all of the young males in their family. There were six of them, maybe more. Two of them died during the arrest, it was during the arrest they were killed by mistake. They tried to escape, to run, so they were killed. At that time my parents said “you have to go, forget school, take your things and go and live with your paternal uncle, or with anyone. The important thing is that you have to get out of this neighbourhood.”

The soldiers had seized documents and photographs from the house, including photos they had taken together. Mohsin's parents insisted that he leave the country soon. They could not all leave together because of financial constraint. They believed that Mohsin was in the greater danger as a young man and so he moved to the UAE in October 2005 to live with his uncle. Mohsin eventually moved to Syria where his parents had, by 2006, also moved because of the intense violence that took hold of Baghdad.

But Mohsin's displacement had also started before his migration, and before the deadly raid on his neighbour's home. Daily life was disturbed in a number of ways. In the first six months of occupation, his family had no income, his father's pension payments stopped. Mohsin went out to work, against the will of his parents, and despite the threat of bullets from soldiers, gangs, militias, and of deadly explosions. The street had “become like a jungle, the toughest rules” and “everyone could do as they pleased”.

... It got to the stage where if we left the house, we would only leave in groups of three or four, just in case something happened to us. This is something I've just remembered, I'd forgotten about this before. We made an agreement between us. If something happened to us then at least one of us might be able to escape and let our families know that Mohsin had been killed for example, or that something had happened to him. At the time, those who were killed on the street, their corpses would go missing. You wouldn't know where to

find the corpse. It might be burned, dumped in the rubbish. You wouldn't know.

The occupation had disrupted his education and capacity to learn.

Half of the teachers weren't attending school because of the [security] situation. Some of them transferred to a different area. The cadre of teachers was getting weaker, there were less of them. ... To study you need to be at ease, psychologically. You need to be in the right condition to absorb the knowledge. We didn't have that. What was driving us to study was the hope that we had. When you have a dream and you want to achieve something it drives you.

The pressures of daily life had made studying extremely difficult. There were no public services providing reliable energy or transport. Studying at home became difficult and he had to study by candlelight some evenings. Within the family, there was a debate as to whether it would be better for Mohsin to take a year's deferral in the hope of the situation improving, or to hastily finish his final high school exams and then study elsewhere. As well as the American Army raids in their area, sectarian killings were becoming more widespread in Baghdad. Mohsin was a young Sunni man but with a name more commonly associated with Shias. The American Army raids had become more frequent in his neighbourhood and he had already spent several months living with relatives in different areas of Baghdad before finishing his exams in June 2005. When American soldiers arrested and killed some of his neighbour's in October 2005, his parents were both in agreement that he had to leave. First he left the neighbourhood and then, in December 2005, he left Iraq for the UAE.

The Palestinians of Iraq and Abu Waleed's story

The Palestinians had never been citizens under any Iraqi government. There were fluctuations in the level of rights they had since their arrival in 1948 with regards to property ownership but had full access to education and healthcare and had long enjoyed secure residency. Their situation changed drastically in 2003, as Abu Waleed explains:

Several months after the occupation, the residency directorate, which was connected to the Ministry of Interior, required of the Palestinians that they sign to confirm their presence in Iraq each month at the directorate. ... We had never had to deal with such a law until 2003.

After 2003 we had to go there with our ID and travel document and confirm our presence there. Your document would be stamped along with another paper to confirm that you had checked in. With that law we lost our permanent residency. ... There were special ID cards for Palestinians in Iraq issued by the Iraqi government. They stopped issuing them, and they stopped issuing and extending travel documents. More importantly they stopped issuing documents and ID cards to those who were born in Iraq. All of the Palestinians who were born in Iraq from 2003 until the middle of 2006 were not issued with birth certificates. ... They started issuing them again in mid 2006 but with conditions.

At a stroke, thousands of Palestinian refugees in Iraq were transformed from permanent residents into foreigners, but ones without a sovereign state. There were echoes here of the displacements of statecraft after the French revolution that simultaneously created categories of citizen and foreigner. Power relations were realigned under a new rubric which provided for novel forms of eligibility and ineligibility. The revolution invented “the national citizen and the legally homogeneous national citizenry”; at the same time it also invented “the foreigner” (Brubaker, 1992: 46-47). Essentially, to craft and empower the notions of national citizen, indispensable new forms of foreignness also had to be constructed. Thousands were displaced after the revolution as part and parcel of the process of inventing the nation-state. The new France cast out those falling victim to the readjustments that produced the new category of “foreigner” (ibid.). Seen through this lens the new laws turned the Palestinians into foreigners as part of a process of strengthening the state, a purge of those that the state deemed to be a threat, real or imagined, to the new order. The residency issue could be explained by the loss of records which resulted from the looting of government ministries in 2003 (Zaman, 2011: 266). But Abu Waleed saw it differently.

We didn't interpret those laws as a coincidence, or something casual. We understood the connection between those laws and the new Iraq. With the occupation of Iraq, we began to see and feel, as Palestinians, and also as Iraqis, that Iraq had entered a new type of era. It was different. Values, understanding, behaviour, the political system, it all changed.

This new era meant losing the relative security that the former political order had provided them. His views were understandable given the context. Shortly after the occupation the American Army raided the Palestinian Embassy in Baghdad and arrested diplomats and staff.

The Chargé d'Affaires was not released until April 2004 (Mohammed, 2007: 78). The American Army was apparently searching for weapons and fighters during the May 28th 2003 raid. The embassy was forced to close for 70 days (Shar'aan, 2003). It was an important organisation for Palestinian refugees in Iraq. It had intervened on behalf of many families facing eviction in 2001 and was a reminder that their presence was still welcomed by the authorities.

In addition to this symbolic attack and the loss of secure residency, they no longer enjoyed security of tenancy. Abu Waleed explained that the Iraqi government was renting property from private landlords to house the Palestinians, but the government froze the rents after the Iraqi dinar collapsed in the 1990s. The landlords were receiving the equivalent of a few dollars in monthly rent and laws were in place that prevented them from kicking out their tenants. In 2001 the courts agreed to some landlords' eviction requests. Some families were evicted but the Palestinian Embassy and political groups in Iraq intervened and the rulings were frozen by a Minister.

That was in 2001. But after 2003 there was no state. ... The property owners threatened families, they had weapons. They did it with menace, it wasn't pleasant. They gave some of them a week to leave, others a month and a half.

Around 400 families were evicted and set up a camp in a football stadium. "The Camp of Return" was located in Nadi Square. Palestinian organisations - the National Council and the Popular Council - tried to solve the issue. Eventually the UNHCR, with help from the Qatari Red Crescent, rented buildings in Baghdad and transferred the families there. Abu Waleed experienced displacement, similar to the ones he described above, which came with what he understood to be a veiled threat. The rent on his apartment was not at the low levels of the 1990s but an affordable \$140 a month. His landlord trebled the rent to 500,000 Iraqi dinars and one day sent his older brother to speak to Abu Waleed.

"How are you going to pay 500,000?" he asked. I said that maybe we would borrow some money. Then he told me that he was going to see Haydar Al Abbaadi about something. Haydar Al Abbaadi lived about 300 metres away from my house, he was a politician in the

Da'wa party¹⁰ who came to Iraq after the occupation, he's well known. I read it as a warning. I asked him to give me the chance to find somewhere else to live. ... That was in 2004, in May. I found a different house in August 2004.

This was an example of an action which takes on a threatening meaning in an environment of imminent threat, of community wide insecurity. A visit to a politician living close by would not necessarily constitute a threat in itself, certainly not in the securer era of the 1990s. But read in a context of insecurity in Iraq and the increasing targeting of the Palestinians, Abu Waleed decided to move house – he was aware that many Iraqi politicians had connections to armed groups and it was possible that his landlord's older brother was issuing a thinly veiled threat to summon an armed group to intervene.

In addition to the evictions, Abu Waleed spoke about an anti-Palestinian media campaign which began in 2005. On the morning of May 12th 2005, a bomb was detonated in a market in Baghdad Jidida, killing dozens of people. That evening four Palestinians were arrested and charged with the crime. The next day Al Iraqiya TV, the state channel, broadcast their confessions. Their faces were swollen, they had clearly been beaten and tortured. Abu Waleed believed the whole thing to be a fabrication which further exacerbated the security situation in Baghdad. The four men were eventually released. A documentary was available on the community website of the Palestinians of Iraq,¹¹ which is based on interviews with the falsely accused men. They give detailed accounts of their gruelling experiences after being arrested by the Wolf Brigade, an armed unit attached to the Ministry of Interior. Confessions were forced from them in detention through an intensive daily routine of torture. Part three of the series begins with a clip of the May 14th broadcast on Al Iraqiya TV. An interrogator aggressively berates a subdued Aamir Mulham, one of the accused, when he asks:

Can you tell me what grudge you hold against the Iraqi people, for you to do what you did?

I have no grudge sir.

¹⁰ Hizb Al Da'wa is one of the exile parties that returned to Iraq after the occupation. They are a nominally Shia religious party with a sectarian agenda and are backed by Iran. See Chapter 3.

¹¹ The documentary was previously hosted on the website *Filastiniyu Al Iraq* [The Palestinians of Iraq] www.paliraq.com but is now hosted on YouTube. See Part 3 of the documentary: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geqdP8pgyMQ>

You have no grudge? You're Palestinian aren't you?

Yes sir.

You eat and drink in Iraq. Iraqis spent their years doing military service, you never had to do military service. Iraqis couldn't travel, yet you could travel.¹² Iraqis don't have houses, but you have a house. What was the crime that Iraqis committed against you? You even get more money than Iraqis do! Measure it, what the Iraqi martyr's salary is and what the Palestinian martyr's salary is!¹³ Is that the crime?!¹⁴

The day after the confessions were screened, Abu Waleed went to the Baghdad Al Jidida market to do some shopping, he lived close by in Al Ghadeer. He saw some banners directed at the Palestinians, about Iraqi blood that had been spilled for them, alluding to Iraqi participation in the 1948 war in Palestine. It contained historical inaccuracies but he also saw it in Al Ghadeer and Palestine Street. The banners remained for several months and a campaign began against the Palestinians.

... newspapers like Al Sabah and others began media campaigns which accused Palestinians of being behind the suffering and oppression of Iraqis. They were saying that the Palestinians had benefited a lot from the former regime and that they were dependants of the regime and that they received special privileges. They were all lies. The facts disprove these claims. This media campaign was a precursor to the targeting of the Palestinians. ...

The Palestinian refugee experience in Iraq showed a striking resemblance to the displacement of the émigrés of revolutionary France in the late 18th century. A series of legal measures was introduced, starting in 1791, which rendered them “more visible than their actual numbers would warrant” and which created an antagonistic climate toward them (Soguk, 1999: 78). The laws ostensibly targeted only the properties of the émigrés, but almost all of them engaged in problematizing them as a group of “bad nationals” who were to be excluded from

¹² A reference to the situation in the Iran-Iraq war when Palestinians were able to travel as they were exempt from service, but Iraqis were not as they were expected to serve on the front. (Zaman, 2011: 268)

¹³ He is most likely referring to the meagre war pensions that Iraqis get. They are meagre in comparison to the \$10,000 that Saddam announced he would be sending to the families of Palestinian martyrs in Palestine, but not to those in Iraq.

¹⁴ See Part 3 of the documentary: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geqdP8pgyMQ>

the body politic until they embraced the new nation-state as the perfect form of representation (ibid.). They were cast as a group who did not belong in this new order, who were trying to undermine it, and were thus denounced. Laws were enacted decreeing the death penalty for émigrés on verification of their identification in November 1791 and March 1793 (ibid.). In a country whose population was estimated to be 26 million in 2003 (World Bank, Google Public Data), the 25,000 Palestinians estimated to be living in Iraq by the UNHCR in the same year (ibid.) represented less than 0.01% of the population. In Baghdad, where the largest number lived, an estimated 22,000 Palestinians (Mohammed, 2007: 27) composed less than 0.05% of the city's five million residents. Yet the actions of the Ministry of Interior - the exclusionary measures and the media campaign - rendered them highly visible and vulnerable. Palestinians reported harassment and abuse when seeking residency renewal at the residency directorate of the Ministry of Interior. Others even reported having their documents confiscated by staff there, putting them at risk of arrest for not carrying valid documents (HRW, 2006: 30-32).

The Palestinians of Iraq knew that other Iraqis believed they had enjoyed privileges under Saddam Hussein. During the Iran-Iraq war, Palestinians were exempt from military service and allowed to travel abroad, putting them in a relatively privileged position vis-a-vis other Iraqis. They were also accused of being Saddam loyalists (Zaman, 2011: 268). The Iraqi Ba'th had, like regimes in other Arab states, used the Palestinian issue as part of its legitimizing propaganda. Israel was a target of comprehensive hostility in regime discourse (Bengio, 1998: 134-139). The issue became more salient during and in the build up to the 1991 Gulf War when Saddam Hussein cast the conflict in apocalyptic terms relating to the struggle against Imperialism and Zionism (Bengio, 1998: 200-201). He eventually ordered missiles to be fired at Israel, something which the state-run media reported enthusiastically (ibid.). Payments of thousands of dollars to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and of those killed in the second intifada, and Saddam's announcement of a €1 billion aid package for Palestinians in the Middle East in 2001 came at a time when the Iraqi population was enduring the hardships of the international embargo (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 10). The affect of these actions was to strengthen the idea that the devastating 1991 war was fought on the Palestinians' behalf, and that the Palestinians had been favoured clients of the regime, even though Iraqi Palestinians received none of the aid themselves (Zaman, 2011: 267).

The Palestinians immediately lost their protection after the Iraqi state, which had been dominated by Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party, collapsed. A different type of state was being formed along ethno-sectarian lines. Its violent methods of control did not represent a break from the past, there was much continuity (Harling, 2010; Chatelard, 2012). But it did define itself against the former regime. Those who came to dominate the state building process after 2003 were former exiles, anti-Saddam opposition groups with no popular base, who were using the de-Ba'thification campaign to consolidate their power by “stocking the state apparatus with loyalists” (Harling 2011: 45).

The Palestinians were an ideal target for a weak government that wanted to make a show of strength to hide its own weaknesses. The former regime's vociferous claims to be championing their cause made it easy to spread disinformation alleging their loyalty to it. Mohammed (2007: 82) explains that the Al Sabah newspaper, the Al Iraqia channel and Al Forat TV sought to create a popular public opinion that was antagonistic to the Palestinians, making them scapegoats for decades of Iraq's woes. The four Palestinians accused of the Baghdad Jidida market bomb were arrested by the Ministry of Interior's Wolf Brigade just 12 hours after the bombing. This campaign against the Palestinians took place shortly after Ibrahim Al Ja'fari announced his government and appointed Bayan Jabar Solagh as Interior Minister (ibid.). Iraq's Minister of Displacement and Migration, Suhaila Abd Al Ja'far, reportedly held a press conference in October 2005 calling on the Ministry of Interior to expel the Palestinians. She said that those who did not have Iraqi citizenship should be sent to Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal and used the alleged involvement of Palestinians in terrorist attacks in the last two years as justification (HRW, 2006: 32). The accusations were unfounded but like refugees elsewhere in the world there were no powerful voices to speak on their behalf. The Palestinians had no militia to defend them either, no part of Baghdad or Iraq to go to where they would be protected at least notionally by any of the armed groups that flourished after 2003. The consequences were deadly. Abu Waleed recalled how it reached the stage where:

A week wouldn't pass without a Palestinian being kidnapped and killed. ... It was in that environment that people were becoming increasingly convinced that they were under threat and that we shouldn't remain in Iraq. Most people were trying to get along with their lives, to evade the effects of the situation. But all Palestinians were anxious and afraid,

individuals and families.

Identity killings – such as murders at armed checkpoints based on the victim's perceived confessional affiliation - became widespread and intensified after the February 2006 bombing of the Al Askari shrine in Samarra. Being caught with any Palestinian identification at a checkpoint effectively became a death sentence, partly because of the vilification campaign, and partly because they were Sunni Muslims. Abu Waleed no longer spoke in a Palestinian dialect in public, speaking only Iraqi and saying he was from the northern city of Mosul to explain any linguistic discrepancies and instructed his children to do the same. Like many other Iraqis he also obtained forged identity documents to evade threats at checkpoints.

The Palestinian Authority's Minister of Refugee Affairs wrote to Ali Al Sistani, the highest clerical authority in Shia Islam based in Najaf in southern Iraq, late in April 2006. He asked for a ruling to help protect the Palestinians of Iraq. Sistani's office released a statement confirming that they should not be attacked and should be protected shortly afterwards (Sistani, 2006b)¹⁵. Sistani had earlier released a *fatwa*, a religious ruling, dated February 21st 2006 in response to a request from the Islamic Human Rights Association. He stated that it was not permitted to harm them even if they had been accused of crimes, and that any accused must be given their rights to a just judicial process (Sistani, 2006a).¹⁶ Sistani's words appear to have had little affect on Abu Waleed's situation, or that of other Palestinians. We shall hear more from Abu Waleed in chapter 6. Let us now look at another vulnerable group in Iraq, the Sabeen Mandaeanes. They asked Sistani for a protective *fatwa* more than once, but their requests were denied. They too lost the protection that they had from the state after 2003, with similarly tragic consequences.

The Sabeen Mandaeanes

The Sabeen Mandaeanes¹⁷ are another vulnerable group affected drastically by state transformation. Like the Palestinians and many other Iraqis, they had relied on the former regime for a level of basic security. They had enjoyed complete religious freedom in modern Iraq. Historically they were artisans and in Iraq they specialised in the jewel and precious

¹⁵ <http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=824163&id=239>

¹⁶ <http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=320138&id=193>

¹⁷ I shall refer to them interchangeably as the Sabeens or the Mandaeanes which is how they referred to themselves.



Figure 10 (above): A Mandaean priest teaches complex rituals to priests in training and to followers, Jaramana, Damascus 2011.



Figure 11 (above): A Mandaean baptism, Jaramana, Damascus 2011.

metals trade. They were not exempt from the problems that afflicted Iraqi society at large, such as those associated with war, sanctions, and the violent methods of the regime. Their religion forbids them from carrying arms but they still had to complete military service - hundreds were killed in the Iran-Iraq war according to the Mandaean Human Rights Group (MHRG, 2011). The MHRG Annual Report of 2011 documents the crimes that have been committed against the Mandaeans since 2003, including robberies, killings, kidnappings, and forced conversions. In Damascus I learned that the Mandaean Association there had registered between 13,000-14,000 Mandaeans between 2006 and 2007. This had declined to around 5,000 in 2011. This was from an estimated 45,000-50,000 total in Iraq before 2003, a figure now said to be under 6,000.

They are the followers of an ancient gnostic and monotheistic faith. Scholars differ on when they migrated to Iraq from the Jordan valley but the Mandaeans are discernible from the second century C.E. (Buckley, 2002: 3). They are mentioned in three separate verses of the Quran as people not to be feared because they believe in Allah.¹⁸ This was something each of the Mandaean men I interviewed wished to emphasise to me. This was a response to the false labelling of the Mandaeans as “infidels” by armed groups wishing to justify attacks on them with an incorrectly manipulated interpretation of the Quran. It was also perhaps because they saw me as a Muslim and feared I had taken on those prejudices. Every Mandaean I met took pride in the belief that they were “the original inhabitants of Iraq”, “the origins of Iraq”, and the oldest monotheistic faith. One even told me that the Mandaeans preceded the Christians in Iraq by 2000 years.

The Mandaeans are known for their distinctive baptism rituals which must be conducted in clean flowing water, preferably in a river. In past times, gatherings of a few thousand Mandaeans along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates were not uncommon during important religious dates. In the mid 1990s there was a Mandaean cultural revival which included the translation from Aramaic into Arabic of the Ginza Rabba, their most important holy text. The Mandaeans distributed copies to institutions across the country. Importantly, they made sure that every courtroom in Iraq had a copy so that Mandaeans' testimony could no longer be rejected on the grounds that their book was not present beside the Quran and the Bible. They

¹⁸ They are mentioned in the Quran in three separate verses – in Al Baqara 62, Al Hajj 17 and Al Maida 69 – as people who believe in Allah.

sent copies to Muslim scholars including Ali Al Sistani, the highest authority in Shia Islam today. Sistani returned positive comments on their holy book.

They experienced discrimination in the 1990s, which Hadi described as being isolated rather than widespread, but the state provided them with protection. In 1994 a delegation from the sect was granted a meeting with Saddam Hussein. As was the custom, they had brought him a lavish gift: an open book sculpted from silver with script from the Ginza inlaid in gold, in Arabic and Aramaic. Hadi explained that

As you know, if you were meeting Saddam Hussein, it was an opportunity for you. Whatever you asked from him you would get. Saddam Hussein was the state, he was the government. He was everything.

They informed him that a school text book defined the Mandaeans as worshippers of the stars and planets, and that some Muslim preachers had referred to them as infidels in their sermons.

He said “Where is that written?” We told him it was in one of the school books. He said “no no no, I do not accept that. You are the origins of Iraq. You are the original Iraqis. People who say those things do not know you and do not know your value, or the history of Iraq”.

Saddam said that?

Yes! He immediately said that a committee must be formed to remove those words and the Sabaeans should choose what they want to replace it. He gave an order to the Ministry of Endowments that any one [preacher] who says bad things about us in the mosques must be punished.

After the translation of the Ginza, they requested another meeting with Saddam in 2001 and presented him with a copy of the translation. The number of sermons against the Mandaeans was rising, something Hadi believed was a result of the National Faith Campaign that Saddam had initiated, though he did not say so in the meeting.¹⁹ Shortly afterwards, Saddam appeared

¹⁹ Ali A. Allawi (2007: 56) supports this view stating that with the National Faith Campaign, the regime intended to buttress its authority and legitimacy with displays of piety, but ended up with a growing presence of radical Islamist preachers in Iraq and could not control their radicalising effects on Iraqi society.

on television and spoke about the Mandaean and after that the discrimination stopped. At the meeting he had also given them permission to build the largest Mandaean temple in Iraq on the banks of the Tigris in Baghdad. The land was given to them by government decree but they were unable to see construction begin before the war and the 3000m² plot remains empty.

Hadi told me these things in detail because he wanted to emphasise that although there were problems for the Mandaean and they had suffered like other Iraqis, their objections and requests were heard. According to him, they were generally well respected in Iraqi society. Hadi was certain that the non-proselytizing nature of the sect, and the traditional craft that Mandaean goldsmiths had provided to Iraq's ruling elites for decades, made it clear to Saddam that they were never a threat to his rule. They were in fact *Al Tai'fa Athahabiya*, "the Golden Sect". When Saddam initiated the National Faith Campaign, he wanted to fashion an image of Iraq as the centre of all faiths. The ancient sect fitted well with this image.

He said he was going to build us the biggest and best palace for us in the whole of Baghdad. He was a crazy man, he had ambitions to make the world see that Iraq was the centre of all faiths. He wanted a great mosque and a church, and a temple. He wanted it to have everything.

The situation changed drastically for the Mandaean after the occupation. They began to feel that they were being excluded from the new "Islamic" Iraq as symbols of the old secular and pluralistic one. Discrimination and acts of violence against them were becoming widespread and going unpunished. Shaykh Rami, a Mandaean priest from Baghdad, was also from a family of goldsmiths. One day, in the market where his family business had been for decades:

Some primary school children came to the market, there were maybe 15 or 20 them. They were calling out "Sabaen infidels" and making trouble in the market. They were shouting "the Subba are filthy infidels" and making a racket in the market. It was in the goldsmiths' market, the Qaysarriya market.

Haleem, a Sabaean man in his 60s was from a goldsmiths' family, but also a retired teacher. He was in his 60s and his granddaughter experienced similar problems at school.

My son's daughter, the children in her school, they would threaten her. The girls that were with her would pressure her to change her religion. They were her friends. They quickly changed because of pressure from their parents, the effects of religious extremism, the sudden and surprising effects of it. There wasn't extremism before. Had all this extremism appeared in two or three years? What was it that meant all this extremism appeared? Her friends that had been on trips with her, that used to laugh together. There wasn't any religious discrimination and then the same students start saying "why don't you change your religion and become a Muslim? Why are you still Sabean?" She told her parents about this, she told my son. We had to take this kind of thing seriously. A girl at middle school. What was behind this? A student that says something like that, where does she get it from? From her parents, or possibly her neighbours. So we took it seriously.

The Sabeans are citizens of Iraq and could not be turned into foreigners by a change in the law as the Palestinians had been. But there was a perception that as non-Muslims, they were being excluded from the new Iraq. Hadi was unhappy with the new constitution which contains a paragraph declaring Iraq to be "a state whose platform is the Islamic religion. That's despite the presence of other religions." He was referring to Article 2 which states that:

First: Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation:

- A. No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam
- B. No law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy.
- C. No law may be enacted that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this Constitution.

But it also mentions Iraq's minorities:

Second: This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabeans.²⁰

²⁰ http://www.uniraq.org/documents/iraqi_constitution.pdf

For Hadi, the declaration that no law can be passed which contradicts Islam was enough for him to feel that the constitution had “cancelled the other”. He was uncomfortable with the dominant position given to Islam. And although the Mandaean and other non-Muslim groups in Iraq were constitutionally enshrined in the new Iraq, they experienced things very differently. Parliament has allocated eight seats for Iraq's minorities. The Shabak, Yazidis, and the Sabians were allotted one each, the remaining five went to Christians (Visser, 2010). Shaykh Rami was not hopeful:

As for us being given some seats, what's the point of that, of having a seat if you can't actually make any decisions? What's the point if you don't have an opinion? We have an official in Baghdad province, he's director of religious endowments for the Sabian Mandaean. We also have an ambassador and a representative in parliament. They hold positions in the state and they're supposed to be entitled to ask for any kind of rights. But they're not allowed to. They're only allowed to ask for personal entitlements, they're not allowed to ask for people's entitlements. It's impossible. That's a red line that you're not allowed to cross. You are just something cosmetic to show to international public opinion on satellite television. They want to show that the country doesn't discriminate.

The Sheikh had lost faith in the Iraqi state, believing that it was unable or unwilling to provide Mandaeans with security. Together with a Mandaean delegation, including Sheikh Al Sattar – the head of the sect – he went to Najaf to meet Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the highest Shia religious authority in Iraq. They asked for a *fatwa* – a religious ruling - to protect Mandaeans but Sistani refused each time, citing as the reason the need for a meeting of 25 religious scholars to issue a *fatwa*. The Sheikh described the closing exchange:

Sheikh Al-Sattar said: “We’re being threatened by your people, by Shia political parties. Our sons are being killed and robbed by your people – your people are the reason. We’re asking for a *fatwa* from you. These are our rituals, this is our holy book. We are mentioned in the Quran. So why are we being killed and attacked like this?” Sistani replied: “I can’t issue you with that *fatwa*, so don’t embarrass me any more”.

Hadi offered this analysis:

Sistani is a politician. He has a strategic agenda for the future, one that's in the interest of religious parties. He wants to rid the country of all the non-Muslims, even the non-Shia groups, so that in the future they can declare Iraq to be an Islamic state on the model of *Wilayet al-Faqih*.²¹ The presence of religious minorities prevents them from doing this.

It is not clear what Sistani's motivations were in refusing a *fatwa*. His website contains hundred of *fatwas*, public proclamations, and answers to questions. They seem to cover every aspect of life, from food preparation and prayers to the Iraqi Constitution and the situation of Palestinian refugees in Iraq. It is easy to see why the Sabians were offended. Visser (2006) and Cole (2006) discuss the extent of Sistani's commitment to *Wilayet al Faqih* and popular sovereignty in a depth that there is not space for here. What is important is perception in the eyes of those who took the decision to leave Iraq and how *they* understood Sistani and his refusal to make a strong pronouncement about the Sabians. Hadi and the Shaykh both believed he was a figure powerful enough to help them. After the rejection they had concluded Sistani was conspiring with Iran to turn Iraq into an Islamic state based on *Wilayet al Faqih*.

Hadi spoke with the head of the sect before the meeting and made his position clear. He desired clarity so that he could advise his community accurately.

... I told him [Sattar] to ask for a *fatwa* and if he hesitates or doesn't give it then insist on a *fatwa* to declare that we are infidels. ... Whatever the outcome, I need that written down. I need it so I can tell people that that is what the *Hujja*²² of the Shias, the Muslims, that's what he believes. This is what Ali Sistani thinks about me. They obey him, they do what he says. If he doesn't believe that then he should say it so that I can know that I can no longer live in Iraq. If the *Hujjat Al Islam* doesn't accept me here, he thinks that we are infidels, then we have a problem with him. He won't ... let me live with his people, and that's why it is dangerous for Mandaeans to remain in Iraq.

Sistani was correctly understood as a powerful figure of influence in the new Iraq but his

²¹ *Wilayet al Faqih* means "the rule of the jurisprudent". It is a model of Shia Islamic theocracy, currently used in Iran, which grants political power to the highest Shia clerical authority. Sistani is recognized as the highest authority and thus the system would, in theory, suit political ambitions he may harbour. The next highest authority is Khamenei, currently the Supreme Leader of Iran.

²² *Hujja* or *Hujjat Al Islam* is a title given to Shia clerics of high authority.

ability to make the Shia community obey his pronouncements was overestimated. The power of his rulings was overshadowed by Iraq turning into a state of violence. The Palestinian Ambassador to Iraq, Dalil Al Qusoos, is quoted as saying that despite meeting Shia figures like Sistani and Muqtada Al Sadr, the Sunni cleric Harith Al Dhaari, and Iraqi president Jalal Al Talabani, and them offering their genuine services to the Palestinians: “the exceptional circumstances were more powerful than any official initiative could be.”²³ Hadi and Shaykh Rami never mentioned Sistani's *fatwa* for the Palestinians but they knew enough about the range of rulings he issued on his website to feel shunned by the cleric. In looking for a leader whom they believed that Muslims would “obey” they were hoping would produce the same protective result for the Mandaeans as Saddam Hussein had in the past. I also think that Hadi's analysis - that there is a concerted effort to rid Iraq of its minorities – is also an example of meaning making, an effort to make sense of the acute and violently imposed changes to the Mandaeans' status in Iraq since 2003. It is what Colin Davis²⁴ says is “the need to make habitable meanings from uninhabitable truths.” This interpretation of the past provides a logical (and persuasive) framework through which to understand a past which is so intimately linked to the moment of the telling. The assessment that it is “dangerous for the Mandaeans to remain in Iraq” makes sense through this framework and justifies the projection of their future paths into a geographical space far removed from Iraq. It therefore also justifies the decision to be in Syria, however difficult the situation may be, waiting for the opportunity of refuge in a third country, as long as it is safe to do so.

Conclusion

The cases discussed in this chapter show the causative relationship between displacement and both state collapse and state transformation. The collapse of the Iraqi state in 2003 had direct implications for displacement. Security and public services disappeared with the state. This allowed criminality to flourish and also meant that specific groups of Iraqis could be targeted with impunity as part of purges. I related the cases of high ranking administrators in the former regime and military officers who were directly preyed upon by the emerging new order. The institutions - such as Ministries and many public buildings - of the old Iraqi state collapsed and were looted. The bureaucracies and apparatuses may have been ransacked or destroyed by invading armies, but the occupiers and emerging order believed that the

²³ See <http://www.paliraq.com/news.aspx?id=5451>

²⁴ Davis (1991:302) quoted in Skultans (1998: 43).

perceived embodied symbols of the former state had to be targeted in order to secure power. As Gardner notes, the powers of the state can be conceived as inseparable from the bodies of associated citizens (Gardner, 2012: 28). Former army officers and high-level administrators were obvious targets. The Palestinians of Iraq were subsequently attacked. They were also perceived as beneficiaries of the former regime, loyalists to it who could be targeted in ways potentially beneficial to agendas of statecraft.

Among the Mandaean I interviewed there is a strong belief that they have been excluded from Iraq. Other Iraqis in this chapter related experiences at the hands of occupying forces and the state itself, which suggest that exclusion is part of the process of reshaping the nation state. From 2003 intensive episodes of conflict in which rival groups attempted to seize state resources and to occupy the political spaces of the state have entailed the identification and exclusion of Iraqis formerly seen as part of the fabric of national society. The narratives here show that purging the old order not only means removing selected former employees but also removing symbols of the idea that Iraq was once a state tolerant of religious pluralism, and among such symbols are the religious minorities. The accounts from this chapter provide an indication of what it is like to experience first hand the consequences of transformations of state. Those affected have been part of political processes, ambitious and protracted in nature, in which entire social groups are targeted as part of agendas to create a new political order.

These processes lead to disruptions and constraints in people's daily lives which create pressures to leave. In some cases the pressure is intense and violent to the extent that leads to abrupt decisions to leave. In other cases the displacement process is as protracted as the process of abolishing the old order. In the more protracted cases, what has emerged so far is a pattern whereby individuals and families experience episodes of constraint which they attempt to adapt to, or episodes of intensifying threat which they attempt to evade, or both. The two can be intertwined and the process of threat can lead to an increase in the constraints on a person's ability to function in a valued way. As the threats accumulate, the aggregation of constraint can develop into a threat to survival. The choices become extremely limited, they become hard choices whereby all of the options are unpalatable but moving is the lesser of evils.

I also demonstrated the coercive effect of cumulative causation. Migration alters the context within which the decisions of others to leave are made – or not. The departure of large numbers of people from Baghdad to the provinces altered the contexts in which remaining Iraqis made choices pertaining to migration. The context was perceived to be less secure as a result of large numbers of the city's residents leaving. This exerted pressure to leave on those who had not initially desired to leave but were coerced into it by an altered context which felt insecure. I discuss in more detail the coercive effects of cumulative causation in the next chapter.

The experiences presented in this chapter also provided insights into the gendered nature of migration decisions. In all of the cases, the men were the principal decision makers. In Farah's case, the adults met to discuss whether to leave Baghdad for rural Iraq or not. The men ignored the advice of the women and initially remained in Baghdad. In Anwar's situation, we heard how the women in his family decided to leave and spend time with relatives in Iraq's countryside. Because of gender roles, Anwar and his father had to remain in Baghdad. In the period before the invasion, many Iraqi men of military service age were called up by the state and therefore forbidden from leaving Iraq to escape the bombing. Anwar himself remained – as a young man he was expected to watch over their property, something the women in his family were not expected to do. In these cases men held the decision making powers but were also exposed to greater risk of harm.

Material resources play a role in mobility. Majeed was able to muster up the resources to leave Iraq but assumed it would only be temporary. Now he is stranded in Syria without the financial resources to return to Iraq or move to a third country of resettlement. We shall also see examples in the next chapters of the effects of material resources – or lack thereof – on mobility and the capacity to evade threat.

We also saw glimpses of the different ways in which transformations of state manifested themselves as changed to the social relations in people's daily lives. Adnaan could no longer live in his apartment building because a hostile political faction had set up office there. Mohsin's neighbourhood changed and became a hostile space. In both cases the changes

contributed to the decision to leave in a coercive way. It is this type of coercive transformation which forms the central subject of the next chapter where I show how these emerging threats constrained the lives of Iraqis. Their social spaces were transformed in threatening ways: circumstances presented Iraqis with coercive proposals forcing them to adjust their lives and routines often in disruptive ways. In some cases the constraints accumulated to the point of a hard choice situation, forcing them into a decision to leave their homes, and in some cases Iraq altogether.

Chapter 5

Coercive transformations of space and the emergence of the coercive landscape

Most of them said that they would be protected by the Mehdi Army.

They would tell us that "you should feel lucky because you are protected, you have the Mehdi Army to protect you here."

Did you feel lucky?

No.

- *Farah*

In the previous chapter I presented the experiences of those who were directly targeted by the nascent Iraqi state. The subjects of this chapter were not threatened as part of a purge against perceived symbols or embodiments of the former state. However, they experienced threatening changes to their daily lives which were shaped by transformations taking place at the state level. These permutations affected their lives profoundly but were ones over which they had no control. Their environments changed in ways which presented them with coercive proposals – situations of constrained choices all of which left agents below valued baselines. Some of the subjects in this chapter were presented with hard choices – a set of proposals so unpalatable that all of the few available choices led to dire straits. For some, the valued baseline was staying alive and was threatened by the re-ordering of their social world.¹ By looking at the experiences of Iraqis in this chapter through the conceptual framework I outlined in Chapter 1, the process of displacement can be more thoroughly understood.

Here displacements took place inside what Harling (2011) describes as “a state of violence” - in distinction to a state of law.² The post-invasion Iraqi state was unable to “provide peaceful mechanisms for addressing political conflicts, to form a common frame of reference, and to enforce its monopoly over the use and legitimization of violence” (Harling, 2011: 45). Three

¹ See Chapter 1, “Coercion: the missing concept”

² See Chapter 3 and Harling (2011).

interrelated processes conspired to create this situation of generalized and indistinct insecurity: an exclusionary post-2003 political process; sectarian differentiation; and the privatisation of violence: gangs, militias, mercenaries and insurgent groups filled the security vacuum caused by state collapse (Harling, 2011: 45-48). Intense violence in Baghdad was triggered by the bombing of the Al Askari shrine in Samarra in February 2006 - a holy Shia shrine. It peaked during 2006 and 2007 but its legacy continued to affect people's lives in the years afterwards. These characteristics were typical of many contemporary armed conflicts, what Kaldor (2012) refers to as "new wars". In these conflicts, civilians are targeted by a range of armed state and non-state actors who typically make claims to power based upon identity labels. Forced population movements are standard tactics deployed by such groups. The aim is to homogenise populations on the basis of identity labels in order to exert greater control over them.³

It was in this environment that many Iraqis found that their social world had been transformed into what I call a coercive landscape - one in which threats were perceived in a multitude of social spaces and which is likely to force migration. It refers to a social world in which threat diminishes choice as well as to the physical environment itself. In this chapter I focus on component spaces of the coercive landscape. I refer to school, work and neighbourhood spaces as well as the routes to and from them. This is not of course an exhaustive list but draws attention to how threats can transform daily life and how agents adapt – sometimes with migration. When multiple spaces in daily life contain threats, agents can find themselves in a coercive landscape. In Chapter 6 I shall outline the emergence of a coercive landscape from the perspective of longitudinal case studies from members of Iraqi minority groups. For now, the specific spaces remain the central focus of the chapter. I also explain the ways in which dynamics of cumulative causation (Douglas Massey, 1990) played a coercive role – both in forcing agents to move, and forcing them to remain.

I use Doreen Massey's concept of space, understood as being constituted of social relations. These are never static but inherently dynamic. As with all social relations they are inevitably "imbued with power and meaning and symbolism" (Doreen Massey, 1994: 2-3). Displacement occurs when power relations within them become relations of subjugation and potential threat. It takes place in everyday life when spaces such as those of the school, the workplace,

³ See Kaldor (2012) for further discussion of new wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq and Afghanistan.

and neighbourhood become ones of insecurity, transformed in a way that puts people into increasing circumstances of constraint. I address displacement here as a process (Marfleet, 2011: 281). It is not merely expressed through migration and physical relocation is not assumed to be its defining feature (Lubkemann, 2008: 454). Displacement also happens *in place* as a result of involuntary immobility (ibid.). Not everyone who wishes to relocate is able to do so in ways they deem acceptable, as Farah and Yousif's stories show.

In understanding the decision to leave, the neighbourhood is a crucial space. When the integrity of this space is threatened or breached, it can add pressure to leave on the people living there. This integrity is subjective - its understanding varies among different groups. The growing presence of the sectarian Mehdi Army militia in a neighbourhood may have made some impoverished Shias feel protected but made Christians and other families feel threatened. The experience of Farah is a poignant example that I shall present in this chapter. Another important space is the school, which for Raz, Jasim, and Baan became an area of danger, discrimination, or both. Lubkemann (2008: 470) identifies what he calls "key social life projects" that are highly consequential in relation to displacement. Such projects are crucial to the social well being of individuals; their disruption at an early stage can sabotage future social life projects. Disruption to high school education for these students would also potentially deny them a university education and thus with it their entry into the professional class. The appearance of threats in their educational spaces was not, in all cases, a key episode in their families' eventual decision to leave but it was an important part of the displacement process.

Similarly, when threats appear in the space where a person works, what Sen (1999) refers to as the instrumental economic freedom to generate income can be disrupted - this too is a key part of the displacement process. For many Iraqis even the route to work became littered with threats. These may have been checkpoints controlled by hostile militias: at the height of sectarian killings during 2006 and 2007 many Baghdad neighbourhoods were understood to be off limits to those without the correct identity documents. The route to work can be changed but the place of work in a climate of economic collapse and insecurity is much harder to change. When Mehdi Army militia men came for Raz's father, it was a pressure the family could not deflect, despite their neighbourhood being protected by the Resistance. Knowing that the militia was seeking him out, the neighbourhood effectively became the only

safe space for his father in the whole city and the family decided to leave Iraq altogether.

I shall also note that a small number of Iraqi students that I interviewed have experienced what Lubkemann (2008: 456-457) has called “socially fortuitous wartime migration”. This is when a wartime relocation leads to an increase in social opportunities and empowerment. They were able to take advantage of a scholarship programme, based in Syria, to study in American universities. This was created after the military occupation to redress some of the enormous devastation wreaked upon the Iraqi education system by sanctions and invasion. Those lucky and able enough to succeed were to receive a better education than they could ever have had in Iraq. At the societal and national level of analysis however, the handful of students the programme has helped is not significant. Rather, it is fortuitous if the individual in particular, and perhaps the nuclear family, is the only unit of analysis.

Threats in the school space

In the lawlessness of the state of violence that was Iraq after 2003 the school space was changed by military occupation and became laden with threats. Students risked being caught in fire-fights and parents risked the dangers of driving their children to school at a time when car bombs exploded daily. There were also threats to a student acquiring an education as sectarian discrimination entered the school space, which in Raz's case became a site of exclusion. Raz attended the highly regarded Baghdad College High School. It had large grounds and made a convenient place for American Army Humvees and Bradleys⁴ to use as a stationing point in between patrols. Luckily for Raz no one attacked the soldiers in his school but his journey to school increased from 30 minutes to 1hr and 15 minutes because of the direct effects of the occupation. As Raz said: "it was because of all the road blocks and the checkpoints, and of course the unexpected car bombs or fire fights." In Jasim's school in the Khadhraa district of Baghdad the American Army stationed themselves in a police station nearby. There was a road bridge next to the school above a highway used by American Army vehicles, from which Resistance fighters would launch their attacks. Jasim was in the school field playing football when an explosive device blew up underneath an American Army vehicle across the street twenty metres away. It shattered the school's windows and left him in

⁴ The Humvee can be mounted with a rotating heavy machine gun, or missiles. <http://www.army.mil/factfiles/equipment/wheeled/hmmwv.html> The Bradley is an armoured personnel carrier equipped with a 25mm chain gun cannon, a heavy machine gun, and anti-tank missiles. It can weigh upto 30 tonnes when fully loaded. <http://www.army.mil/factfiles/equipment/tracked/bradley.html>

shock for hours. His parents immediately transferred him to a different school in Mansour district. There was another explosion there on the very day they went to register Jasim: that was the decisive event which made his parents leave Iraq. As with other forced migrations, there were many events of displacement before it, as we shall see later in the chapter.

Baan attended an all girls' school. By 2006 her teachers became afraid to speak openly about politics and any other subject matter that would highlight their sectarian identity. They feared being targeted. One day the school enforced a strict dress code - all the girls had to wear the *hijab*, a headscarf which covered their hair, after the school received a threat. It was also in Khadraa, a "hot zone"⁵ where she said frequent clashes would occur between the American Army and different militias. She added that: "We had an indoor playground and we all had to stay on the ground. I remember there were bullet holes in some of the windows." A girl survived after a stray bullet hit her leg. The frequent clashes and the growing danger from gunmen and explosions on the route to school led to her mother transferring her to an inferior school but one close to where they lived and out of the "hot zone". Baan's mother told me she had to drive along "The Road of Death" to get her to school. One day in May 2006 her mother and brother were lucky to escape the rotating canon fire from a Humvee vehicle as it chased a car full of armed men. Baan lived in Al Ghazaliya which itself became the site of intense fighting, a further reason why her family relocated to a different neighbourhood. We shall return to the rest of their displacement experience later.

Teachers were targeted in many schools, putting pupils in danger of being shot in the crossfire and also depleting the teaching cadre in the school. In Farah's school some teachers were killed, including the principal, who was a replacement for another who had fled the country. Farah's history teacher was shot after being threatened and her teachers in general showed a similar fear to Baan's: they were afraid of saying anything which might draw attention to their sectarian identity. In some classrooms power relations had been reversed. In the past the students were afraid of the teachers, authority figures who could fail them. In a climate of lawlessness the teachers feared the militia or political party to which the students may have been connected to. Sara explained that teachers were targeted for revenge by failed students.

⁵ "Hot zone" is the term used by Iraqis to describe an area of intense armed conflict. In Arabic it is a *mantaqa saakhina* [منطقة ساخنة].

In Raz's school, teachers were required to have a Masters or PhD. This, he explained, made them into targets because of their status as intellectuals. His teachers began carrying pistols for self-defence; many teachers were killed in other schools in the city. In 2005, as the nascent state was beginning to assert its authority, his school space changed again and the power relations within the school changed too. Hizb Al Da'wa⁶ had taken control of the Ministry of Education and installed one of their people as Dean⁷ of Raz's school. Consequently all Sunni students from Anbar province in western Iraq, and from Al Adhamiya in Baghdad, were given unexpectedly poor grades that year. Some students from Al Adhamiya received a grade of zero even though a student could expect to get 10% for writing his name. Raz's family name indicated that he was a Sunni Arab with origins in western Iraq. The areas mentioned were all sites of resistance to the occupation and to the new political order in which Shia politicians with sectarian agendas dominated. The resistance in these areas consisted predominantly of Sunni Arabs and Raz understood this as a type of collective punishment. Raz was a high flyer in his school and had expected a grade average in the high 90 percentiles for his year six final exams,⁸ that determine which university a student can attend as well as the choice of degree subject. He was given a 76% average which meant that he had to attend a private university in Baghdad, considered inferior to state universities. It cost his father \$1,400 in fees for the first year; this was wasted as his family had to leave Iraq halfway through the academic year because of a threat to his father's life.

Not everyone was displaced by sectarian corruption and the collapse of order in schools. Some less talented students benefited - they were able to get high grades by taking exams in stronghold areas of sectarian militias, where militiamen could intimidate teachers, or install *their* people into positions of influence in schools. In fact, the reason Raz and others were so certain that they had done well in their exams was because students in the classroom had been helping each other and checking their answers. He told me that the teachers did nothing about it because by then militias were breaking into schools and allowing students of the same sect to cheat in exams: "This was happening all over Iraq. Our neighbour's niece, I was tutoring her English. She was miserable in English. ... She goes and takes the test in Najaf. Her grade

⁶ Hizb Al Da'wa is one of the exile parties that returned to Iraq after the occupation. They are a nominally Shia religious party with a sectarian agenda. They are backed by Iran. See Chapter 3.

⁷ In Raz's school, the head was referred to as the Dean.

⁸ I taught academic English to Raz in Damascus and believe he was not exaggerating on this point.

average was 98%.”⁹

For all of these Iraqi students, the changes to their school spaces resulted in coercive proposals presented to them through coercive circumstances - the school spaces contained threats. For Baan and Jasim they were direct physical threats which meant that remaining in those schools to acquire an education entailed the risk of being injured or killed by a bomb or bullets. The choice presented to Baan was to remain in her superior school and risk fatal injury or move to an inferior but safer school. Her parents decided the latter was best as it also entailed less danger to life to get to it from their home. Jasim's parents chose to take him out of Iraq altogether as the dangers in his school space were the final episodes in a series of threatening experiences which I discuss later. His parents had already moved him from a different school. Raz could not attend the university of his choice because of what he understood clearly as communal discrimination against students with Sunni origins. Attending an inferior university was a threat to his educational and career prospects. These changes represent a part of the displacement process, an increase in constraints upon people's freedom to live in a way that they value.

Threats in the work space

Threats also appeared in the work space and constrained people's economic freedoms. This was one of the pressures that affected Jasim's family before they left Iraq. His father was a doctor in Baghdad, working in the Yarmouk Hospital in the mornings and in his private clinic in the evenings. His clinic in Bayaa' district was open for 20 years before the Mehdi Army seized it in 2004 and has been closed ever since. Farah's father had to adapt after the store where he repaired and traded cars before 2003 was taken over by masked armed men. He opened a new business with a neighbour in Habibiya close to his home. Farah's family are Christians. In the building where her father's store was, it became the only business not run by a Shia Muslim.

This woman came to my dad, she was trying to buy something. He told her the price but she wanted it for less. He told her to go, he wouldn't sell it at that price. She went and then

⁹ As a Shia she was able to attain high grades in Najaf, a Shia shrine city which is under control of Shia political parties. Raz believed that everyone in Najaf and the Shia cities was receiving high grades whether they had earned them or not because of Hizb Al Da'wa's control of the Ministry of Education.

came back with two men, two armed men. They asked my dad "what's going on?" He had to sell it to her [at the lower price], he didn't say anything.

Does that happen a lot?

That happened just once but it was a pretty clear message.

His work space underwent a transformation that presented him with a coercive proposal and put him in a vulnerable position. If he wanted to continue generating income in this space, he would have to accept certain constraints. He could no longer operate as a trader on his own terms and it was clear that he may have to make similar concessions again in the future – he had no militiamen to protect him and had to avoid conflicts with such customers in the future with a potential loss to his income. That moment of intimidation was part of a series of transformations to their social spaces that increased the vulnerability of Farah's family, and which I shall exposit later.

Danger appeared in Anwar's work space in south Baghdad in Dora. He ran a stall there from 1997 to 2005 and was able to support his family and make modest savings. Dora was also an area of escalating conflict. There was an empty square behind his shop about 50 metres away from the main street. Once a place to play football, it became a dumping ground for corpses. He would pass by them each morning on his way to work. Anwar saw more and more corpses as the violence intensified. Worse still, a woman who ran a similar shop just 50 metres away was shot by a young man who calmly drove away.

That was an incident that really made me afraid to stay in my work. I was thinking “are they going to kill shop owners now?” There was a time when they were killing the ice vendors. Then they started killing people who sold fruit and vegetables.

Attacks on shopkeepers were not unusual in the city as militias fought for control over different areas. They were systematically targeted to disrupt the social fabric of a neighbourhood so that residents had to flee for lack of supplies (Harling, 2011: 50). This was another tactic common to new wars: creating “an unfavourable environment for all those people it cannot control” (Kaldor, 2012: 104). Anwar decided to close his stall in 2005. We

shall hear more from him later. These developments constituted a general threat to shopkeepers in Dora. Circumstances presented them all with a coercive proposal: continue generating income in Dora and risk being assassinated, or cease generating income and risk poverty. Anwar chose to preserve his life.

Raz said his father had less time for deliberation in February 2007 when he received warning of an incoming threat in the workplace. It was a decisive moment in their decision to leave Iraq. They lived in a neighbourhood that was off-limits to the Mehdi Army militia as it was protected by Resistance fighters, unlike the predominantly Shia district where he worked as a cosmetics merchant. Raz's father received a tip-off from one of his concerned workers who belonged to the militia, phoning him to say: "Don't even bother closing up shop, just get in your car and drive as soon as possible, they're coming to kill you." His father passed the militiamen on his way home but luckily they did not see him.

So they weren't going to come and get him in his home. But the thing is the situation became unbearable for us because we couldn't leave the city, we couldn't even move around the city comfortably. Even if our relatives wanted to wire us money, that was risking your life [going to collect it].

Suddenly Baghdad outside the confines of their protected neighbourhood was off-limits. After escaping a personal threat his father and family were now faced with unbearable coercive circumstances. The threats from generalized violence had been manageable but being confined to the neighbourhood because of the Mehdi Army was not. Two weeks later they left for Syria after intense deliberation.

Other neighbourhoods in Baghdad did not offer enough security; new neighbours were viewed with suspicion and fear during this period of intense violence in the city. This was true of other provinces in the country so leaving the city was not an option either. Like many Baghdadis, Raz's family had been to the informal camps on the outskirts of the city to regularly donate blankets and food to refugees from the American assault on Fallujah. The conditions were miserable and they had no desire to end up in a similar camp outside a different city. Baghdad offered no alternative source of income for the family at the time. The

freedom to generate income disappeared with freedom of movement and personal safety. Raz's family was faced with what Wertheimer (1987: 233) describes as a "hard choice" situation. This occurs when a proposal is too unpalatable to accept but accepting it similarly leaves you in dire straits. The importance of the choice and the lack of scope for options makes it coercive (ibid.). Circumstances presented Raz's family with this type of coercive "hard choice". Remaining in Baghdad effectively meant being confined to a prison the size of their neighbourhood, and with no instrumental freedom to generate income. Leaving for another neighbourhood was no remedy as none were more secure than theirs. Going to another province provided no guarantees of economic or personal security. Leaving for Syria would put them into economic insecurity and forfeit Raz's year at university - but they would have personal safety. That was the hard choice they made: not unwilling, but *against* their will (Wertheimer 1987: 302). We shall hear more about the pressures that affected them before their relocation later in the chapter.

Coercive transformations of the neighbourhood space

Farah lived in Habibiya which bordered Sadr City, an impoverished, mostly Shia district in east Baghdad which was a stronghold of the Sadrists and their Mehdi Army militia.¹⁰ Many Christians lived in Habibiya but it was not an exclusively Christian district as Muslims lived there too. Habibiya changed for Christians after 2003, but particularly after 2006 when the Mehdi Army began to run amok in Baghdad (Harling, 2011). Farah lived with her father, mother, younger sister, younger brother, and two older sisters. Before the war her neighbourhood felt safe. She was allowed to walk to her friend's house nearby unaccompanied, and to the local church for religious and other activities like piano lessons. But as the Mehdi Army's presence there grew stronger, so too did feelings of insecurity among the Christian population. She told me that many Christian families left Iraq and others moved to the predominantly Christian neighbourhood of Ghadeer. Shia families moved in to the neighbourhood.

Most of them said that they would be protected by the Mehdi Army. They would tell us that "you should feel lucky because you are protected, you have the Mehdi Army to protect you here."

¹⁰ See Chapter 3.

Did you feel lucky?

No.

How did you feel about the changes in the neighbourhood?

It was scary. That's when we felt that our neighbourhood was different. My friends in other neighbourhoods, I mean it wasn't safe anywhere, but for them it was okay to go out and do things. But for us we should be extra careful, and even dress differently. Going to church, that changed, we didn't go a lot.

The church reduced its activities and made a conscious decision to lower its profile and to persuade its congregation to do the same. The church recognised the coercive proposal evident in the transformations taking place in the neighbourhood. In the insecurity of living in a state of violence, the growing presence of Sadrists and the Mehdi Army took on a very threatening meaning. They understood that the circumstances required of them to persuade members of their congregation to adapt their behaviour to draw less attention to themselves, or risk the dangers of attention from the Mehdi Army.

You said you started to dress differently as well?

Yes. Even when we go to church every Friday, we used to go and sometimes they would talk to us, the teachers and the priests. They would say "You should dress more conservatively because you live in this neighbourhood", and they would question what you are doing: "we don't want that, don't attract any attention". ... We are pretty obvious, especially in that neighbourhood because everyone's wearing an *abaaya* and a veil.¹¹

What other things did they advise you to do at the church?

The church was always afraid of something, they always wanted to keep quiet, not attract any attention, you know, live with these people until everything is calm. And they did a pretty good job of that.

This fear was absent before the war. The church was open to everyone, even Muslims would go and visit during Christmas and holidays out of curiosity. Now the church has security guards in front of all the doors. Members of the Shia community asserted their dominance in

¹¹ The *abaaya* is the black clothing that many Shia women wear.

other ways which transformed the neighbourhood space.

Even sometimes in Sunday mass ... people would be upset because it would be at the same time as the mosque, when they call their *azaan* [for prayer]. It would be so loud that we couldn't hear anything [laughs]. It's okay, just let it go.

The call to prayer had always been loud but Farah said: "it was only four loudspeakers, then it became six, and then ten. And now we have the [religious] speeches." These were broadcast almost daily and at a volume so loud that everyone in the neighbourhood heard.

The church was deeply fearful for its congregation. Kidnapping was rife in Baghdad, something that affected all Iraqis in the city but Christians felt particularly vulnerable in Habibiya. The Mehdi Army was known for sustaining itself on the profits of criminal activities; armed robbery, extortion and kidnapping. It eventually began to exploit its own social base - the local Shia population - but the first targets were Christians and Sunnis (Harling, 2011). The church wanted the congregation to avoid inviting attention to themselves and give the Mehdi Army an excuse to cause problems. The militia would enter people's homes looking for alcohol, the consumption of which they had forbidden and would punish anyone caught possessing it.

They would search people's houses for alcohol?

Yes, but with another excuse. Once on New Year's Eve they came. It was obviously the Mehdi Army. It was after 12. We were sitting and eating, but there wasn't any alcohol. They knew it was New Year's Eve and they knew that it was normal for Christians to have alcohol. They came and said, "we heard some shots from your roof and we need to check it out". They came inside, went upstairs I think, then went out.

That happened as her family welcomed 2007, almost a year into the Mehdi Army's attempted takeover of Baghdad (Harling, 2011). Farah had heard that some Muslims in Sadr City were tortured and killed after being caught drinking alcohol. She also heard that most alcohol shops in the area had closed. Her uncle had decided to close his alcohol store before any threats could come his way, and left for the north of Iraq. The Mehdi Army intruded again in early 2007. Three armed men came to the door asking Farah to let them in when her parents were

out. They had been chasing a man who they eventually caught in her garden, where they beat him and drove him away. When Farah's mother arrived and asked one of the armed men what was happening, he said "don't worry, we respect you, we are the Mehdi Army and we don't hurt Christians, we just want this guy". With the growing presence of the Mehdi Army in their spaces, Farah told me that her family "didn't go out very much and we didn't socialise with the neighbours after the war, so we didn't attract any attention for them to come every time there's something."¹² The family were vulnerable and attempted to leave via the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) resettlement program which had an office in Baghdad. Her father did not want to take the risk of going to Jordan or Syria to wait for third country resettlement via the UNHCR. Their relatives had unsuccessfully attempted to do so, expending their savings in the process.

Others in the neighbourhood may have taken comfort from the presence of the Mehdi Army, but Farah's family did not, showing that threats are understood in subjective ways. The space around them and the power relations and meanings within it had changed and now felt threatening. The Mehdi Army were in charge and they felt confident enough to enter people's homes at will. Teachers and priests in the church recognised the possible dangers and asked the congregation to change its behaviour and reduce their visibility as much as they could until safer times. Farah described these changes as scary, everyone knew that the militia was capable of extreme brutality and would not be held to account for its actions in this lawless time - on what was now its own territory. The extra speakers and more frequent speeches coming from the local mosque were not just a constant reminder of the changes happening in their neighbourhood space but a part of it: they can be seen as an acoustic intrusion on their space.

Yousif, a Christian resident of Baghdad, who was originally from a northern province, had relatives in Dora. Part of southern Baghdad, it became a site of intense conflict after 2003. Sectarianism was being expressed in a brutal conflict. Sunni armed groups had the upper hand and once they had purged the area of its Shia residents they turned on the Christians. The number of Christian families falling victim to kidnapping and murder at the hands of militias was on the rise. Threat letters were landing at their gates. His aunt's family decided to leave

¹² She's referring to any special Christian celebration where alcohol might be consumed. It would give the Mehdi Army an incentive to search a Christian house. If they found alcohol there, they could use it as an excuse to harass the family in potentially brutal ways.

Dora before their turn came.

You couldn't imagine it, your neighbour who you'd been living with side by side for 15 or 20 years and then after a while you get a note. You would doubt it was him but then it would turn out to be him. You wouldn't know who really sent you the paper. You wouldn't ever imagine that the people from your neighbourhood would evict you. [My aunt's family] They heard about these things and thought "let's leave, let's try our luck, go elsewhere like our relatives have, and maybe we'll get there". They left before that all started happening. They suffered in Syria. A lot of Christians left Dora after they did, after they suffered. We heard about a lot of awful things that happened to them there.

Yousif's immediate family became the last remaining members of his extended family in Iraq. The departure of Yousif's relatives would impact upon his nuclear family in ways I shall discuss later in the chapter.

Raz lived in Yarmouk district, another part of Baghdad which became the site of conflict but was relatively secure because it was under control of the Resistance. This middle class part of Baghdad had a high number of senior military officers and high ranking regime officials. These groups, says Harling (2011: 54), had strong "connections to people and parts of the country involved in the insurgency", and because of political considerations had fewer prospects abroad than other middle class Iraqis. It "never became an epicentre of Sunni insurgent activity" but held out against the advances made by the Mehdi Army militia (ibid.). Raz explained that it was a confessionally mixed area in which all the families looked after each other. He and his neighbours took turns to guard the street at night, spending many nights on their flat-roofed homes holding rifles. They would shout at any suspicious activity or sign of trouble on their street and were prepared to shoot a person threatening the neighbours. Crime and militia activity were the things that they were guarding against.¹³ The Resistance was focused on fighting the American military presence but came to regard the militias as enemies too – particularly the Mehdi Army. Residents of the neighbourhood shared the Resistance's animosity towards the Mehdi Army, its brutality was well known. People from the neighbourhood could communicate with the Resistance as a member would be in the local mosque most of the time.

¹³ The lines were blurred between these two activities.

The Resistance could not offer full protection though, especially in 2006 after violence peaked in Baghdad. A stray bullet narrowly missed Raz while he was in his garden. One day he was close to his school when a group of men jumped out of a pick-up truck and riddled a house with bullets. Raz was caught in a fire-fight another day whilst out shopping with his mother, as he explained: "the police were involved, ... one of their cars burst into flames and we were right there in the middle of it. Luckily a family that was living nearby, they ... took us to their apartment which was 50 metres away from the whole thing." Daily explosions in Baghdad, stray bullets, firefights, rooftop guard duties became part of daily routine. His parents thought of leaving Iraq, temporarily perhaps, but did not make a permanent migration until his father was threatened. His mother had earlier taken Raz and his younger brother with her to visit relatives in Jordan and Syria to explore the possibilities. They spent two weeks in Jordan in the spring of 2005 and two months in Syria in the summer of 2006. During both visits his mother made inquiries of friends and relatives there about the cost of living. His family chose Syria because it was easier to enter and life was cheaper there and more similar to life in Iraq.

I noted earlier that Jasim's parents decided that they should leave Iraq after the explosions in Jasim's school spaces.¹⁴ But these were the final parts of a series of events leading to their forced migration. His father was a doctor in Baghdad, working in the Yarmouk Hospital in the mornings and in his private clinic in the evenings. His clinic in Bayaa' district was open for twenty years before the Mehdi Army seized it in 2004 and has been closed ever since. In their neighbourhood of Hay Al Jamia there was a huge increase in crime. Many doctors and professors lived there; abductions of children for ransoms of thousands of dollars were frequent.¹⁵ News from neighbours and relatives reached them of kidnappers killing hostages even after receiving a ransom. These stories were circulating in the city. One day they experienced violence on their doorstep.

We had our car stolen from in front of our house. It was a sixteen year old kid and he was holding a gun. He came near my father and he told him to give him the keys and get out. ... It's okay if they steal the car. The thing with militias is not to get yourself killed, and not to make them angry during this process of stealing the car.

¹⁴ See p.124.

¹⁵ Professional families can be expected to pay \$50,000 for the release of a child with no guarantee the child will be released alive.

People gradually began to leave his neighbourhood after 2003, but then more rapidly after 2006. There was no neighbourhood defence force similar to Raz's. This was typical of the middle class neighbourhoods that were a defining feature of Baghdad, as Harling comments. They were inhabited by a state-employed bourgeoisie "prone to emigrate rather than join the fight" (Harling, 2011: 55-56). In Jasim's case we can ask how much of a primary issue the integrity of the neighbourhood is in the decision to move. His parents remained even though its integrity was breached: their car was stolen at gunpoint on their doorstep. Perhaps because the culprit desired only the car the danger felt manageable. Threats in the neighbourhood were manageable in this case because they were not read as personal threats to family members. It was when school spaces became places of lethal danger that they eventually decided to leave. The explosions in Jasim's school compounded earlier pressures and the family relocated to Syria. Their move was intended to be temporary. But after his father died, after his other sister left a continuously deteriorating security situation in Baghdad, little remained that connected his family to Iraq. I shall say more about that later. Jasim's family had adapted to the coercive proposals which were presented to them by the transformations to their social spaces. Remaining in Iraq meant enduring the threat from robberies in the neighbourhood and evading the threat of kidnapping – Jasim was not allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied while he was in Iraq. These were threat-evasion strategies which they could endure. But the explosion in Jasim's second school represented an episode of threat which they could not endure. The school space had shown itself to be potentially lethal and it was a risk they did not wish to take.

Anwar's neighbourhood was another affected by the Mehdi Army. The potential threats in his work space came as undesirable changes were taking place in his neighbourhood.

After the war ... Shias, some of them started to sell CDs, containing *Husseiniyaat*, lamentations and readings about Al Hussein. ... That was banned under Saddam.

You mean like a basta [street stall] in front of the house?

There was a street behind our house, it was the main street. On that street there was a big stall in front of a shop. He'd have all the CDs out on display, with the *Husseiniyaat* on them.

People from the area pooled their resources together to build a *Husseiniya*¹⁶ in the neighbourhood on empty land belonging to the state. Locals would contribute financially and young men would give their labour. That began in May 2003. Anwar said that after that the young men began to gather in large groups, around the CD sellers and the *Husseiniya*: “They were quite insular and were gradually affected by the growing religious activity in the neighbourhood.”

By 2005 the *Husseiniya* had a dome and there were frequent gatherings there. In the growing climate of sectarian politics the new *Husseiniya* became a site of sectarian segregation. “They started becoming more separate from the Sunnis. ... One was becoming extreme and the other was becoming extreme too.” Anwar was from a Shia family who maintained friendly relations with all of their neighbours but some people were different. It was common in Baghdad for a family to cook and distribute food to neighbours and passers by on days of religious significance. But some people began using it as an excuse to impose upon their neighbours:

They might knock on their neighbour's door and demand a hose pipe for water and draw water from the neighbour's house. Or they might demand a large pot from them. If he was Sunni and would say that he didn't want to give it to him, then that would become a problem for him. People started asking for more than they were entitled to [from their neighbours].

Sectarianism was growing. He believed it was present in 2005 but less severe and less visible. After the bombing of the Al Askari shrine in 2006 it plagued the city, expressed in extremely violent forms. Identity killings became daily occurrences: people were being killed on the basis of their perceived confessional identity. Two of his Sunni friends were shot in the street on their way to work by masked men. Anwar avoided spending a lot of time with the young men who gathered in his neighbourhood: “I was afraid to spend time outside with the people there because I didn't want to be carried away by those Shia – well let's not say Shia, I mean the fanatics who were meeting up on the street who were stirring up sectarianism.” Many Sunnis he knew were killed and others departed after receiving threat letters. The

¹⁶ A Shia mosque and community centre.

neighbourhood became exclusively Shia and Anwar disliked the prevalent sectarianism.

I don't want that, I want a mixed area, I want my friends with me, the ones that I know, Sunnis and Shias, Christians. They were all my friends, I didn't want them to leave the neighbourhood and I didn't want to be with the militia that had taken control of the neighbourhood.

The militia was the Mehdi Army. Anwar recognised its local members as the crooks and thieves of the area who had “nothing to do with religion”. Some were known in the neighbourhood as being amongst the petty criminals released by Saddam shortly before the invasion.

He decided to leave Iraq in 2006, temporarily for safety reasons. His parents exerted pressure on him fearing that he would speak out against the activities of the militia men one day and be killed. The family understood this as a coercive proposal: remain together in Baghdad and potentially risk Anwar's death, or separate but be assured of Anwar's safety. From 2003 to 2005, Anwar had not stepped outside his front gate in Baghdad after 10pm. There were curfews, there was no electricity or street lighting, and gunfire and explosions peppered the city's acoustic and physical landscape. In 2005 he made a short trip to Jordan. It changed his perspective on what life could be like with functioning public services and security, it changed his perception of a key baseline.

You would be thinking about how to invest your time in Jordan [instead of about electricity and water]. That was the comparison that I was always making. Two months after that, I decided I was going to leave Iraq, but not [to register] as a refugee.

He made a second trip to Amman in 2006 and worked for a decorating company which taught him new skills and offered him long term employment. The Jordanian government ended Anwar's economic opportunities with immigration restrictions that had negative implications for Iraqis. He had become accustomed to living in a secure environment by this time so decided to leave for Syria which, at the time, was giving visas easily to Iraqis. Anwar made a short visit to Baghdad in October 2008. He had heard that security had improved, that even some of the displaced Sunni families had returned. But he left after ten days because the same

militiamen were there: “At any point it could ignite again. ... It's true that there wasn't any violence but sectarianism was there.” He deliberated about what to do next and calculated that leaving Iraq was the best option.

Anwar's economic position had improved six months after the invasion but the increasing potential threats to his life where he lived and worked proved to be more powerful factors in his decision to leave than increasing his financial resources. Those spaces were transformed and contained threats. The social relations changed into ones of domination and subjugation: Shias were infringing on the rights of their Sunni neighbours. Anwar's baselines of being alive and achieving his simple ambitions in a non-sectarian environment were threatened. Circumstances in Baghdad exerted serious coercive pressures: remaining would mean the possibility of being murdered at work or closer to home. If he did stay alive he would be financially safe and able to achieve his simple material goals but in a sectarian environment that he found distasteful. After visiting Amman an important baseline changed: it was no longer just about personal safety and simple ambitions. He wanted the freedom to invest his time in productive and enjoyable ways, something he could not do in a sectarian Iraq with poor security and public services. Remaining in Iraq meant remaining below the new baseline, leading him to the conclusion that Iraq was no longer a place where he could live in a way that he valued.

Maher was a student in the Fine Arts department at Baghdad University when the invasion happened. He lived with his parents who were government employees, members of the Iraqi middle class that lost the most during the UN embargo: they found it hard to provide for their three sons. He would make small amounts of cash selling paintings to the small contingent of foreigners present in Baghdad at the time, and to Iraqis of the diaspora visiting their relatives. Each would sell for between \$20-25.

After the occupation began in 2003, Maher said: “You could always feel that there was a kind of wave of dust in the sky. It was because of the movement of the helicopters, the movements of the tanks, of the army. The roads were ruined because of the weight of the heavy weaponry that used them.” Traffic increased exponentially as new cars could now be imported and the streets near where he lived felt more crowded with cars. In his neighbourhood, American forces set up a base in a compound that belonged to one of the former regime's security

services: “It was an area where people used to say that whoever entered it would never leave.” Helicopters would regularly take off and land there, flying low above the houses. “The sound they made was very unpleasant for the whole neighbourhood, the sound of the military helicopters and vehicles. These noises weren't present in the past.”

The base in fact provided him with a brief period of economic opportunity. His parents were out of work in the immediate period after the occupation when no salaries or pensions were being paid to government employees. He had sold few paintings: there had been no foreigners in the country for some time as they had evacuated before the invasion; diaspora Iraqis also stayed away. One day an American soldier asked Maher about the paintings in his hands and offered to buy them. Maher realised he could sell paintings to soldiers at the local base. It was in the midst of the neighbourhood meaning that Maher could use his English to speak to them in the early days of the occupation. With the help of one particular soldier, who he suspected of profiting from the exchange, Maher began selling paintings for \$50 each, delivering them through a basket lowered on a rope from the watchtower. Maher would paint portraits based on the photographs that soldiers gave him and they soon invited him into the base.

It was a big change, the people who used to be there were Iraqi security forces. ... For it to become a place full of American soldiers playing basketball and building a swimming pool for themselves, it was a strange thing.

He was earning \$300 during many busy weeks but he declined invitations to work inside the base. But as the occupation went on and American forces were under increasing attack from Resistance fighters, the personnel in the base changed and the soldiers became hostile. “Some of them didn't want to talk to me at all. On a few occasions a soldier pointed his rifle at my face.” The building itself changed too as they added sand crates and barbed wire to the perimeter.

I used to go twice a week, in 2003 and in early 2004. ... Later they were always carrying their weapons ready to fire. ... I stopped going as often, I would only go at certain times, like in the morning.

The social relations changed with the personnel and the increasing insecurity. The base

became a hostile space, a space of threat and not social and economic opportunity. By that time armed groups were killing people for the slightest association with American forces, labelling them as collaborators. From mid 2004 to the beginning of 2005, he only went two or three times and took a small amount of work.

But the American army was not the only group to affect change to his local space. Regime change left another empty space in his neighbourhood, a military base that was filled by strangers to the area.

One day it was a military camp with a large wall, you couldn't see what was inside. Then in the space of an evening, the wall came down and lots of people came and erected buildings there. ... The building method was very poor and disorganised. You could see that there were a large number of families living in small spaces. You felt that an ugly piece had appeared in the neighbourhood. I mean ugly in an aesthetic way because of the buildings, I don't mean in a social way. It felt like the neighbourhood had become two and one was built badly not safely, and in an ugly and disorganised fashion.

But the architectural change was a symptom of the social transformation of the neighbourhood. Most of the residents where he lived were university educated but Maher believed that the new neighbours "hadn't been to school".

Crime was very low, security was very high [before they moved in, but afterwards] ... there was more crime in the area, the people who lived there became afraid.

What kind of crimes? Theft?

Theft, in the beginning. There would be theft and then people started firing weapons randomly into the sky. People started walking in large groups, not gangs, but almost like gangs.

He did not know the real origins of his new neighbours. He heard from some that they were from outside Baghdad, that they were families that had nowhere to live. "Some people said that they were families who had been victims of violence in the past, marginalised people." Maher explained that in the climate of insecurity that engulfed Baghdad, this fear of the other

led to many old residents selling their homes. Iraqis liked to build close relations with their neighbours.

When you live in a house and you've known your neighbours for ten, 20, or even 30 years, you feel safe. Why? Because you don't feel that your neighbour is going to turn out to be someone harmful. But later you would be living in the area and not know the people around you, so you would be afraid. It would add to the sense of fear, in addition to the fear from the security situation.

These changes in the neighbourhood space combined with three episodes of violence and coerced Maher into leaving. The first took place on a taxi ride. A man in the car in front got out and fired two bullets at the taxi. Afterwards Maher wondered: "Was it now this easy to lose your life? If I had just had my face turned one way or another way then I might have been killed." The second incident happened just before dusk in the busy shopping district of Karraada. Maher told me it was among the safest areas in Baghdad at the time but he and a group of friends were all robbed at gunpoint and his friend kidnapped. These incidents appeared to be random acts of violence of which he found it difficult to make sense. They had the effect of increasing his sense of insecurity as he now carried with him the sense that every taxi ride and shopping trip could result in a repeat of the above. The random nature of the incidents meant that he could still tolerate living in Baghdad but he now perceived a coercive proposal in each journey he made in the city: make the journey and risk exposure to shootings and robberies, or remain immobile to avoid this risk. There was already a similar coercive proposal that Baghdadis had to consider with each journey they took across the city because of the high number of car bombs and gun fights in the streets. But because of these incidents above, this proposal took on a more intense meaning for Maher.

The third violent episode was decisive and put Maher in a hard choice situation. It took place after Maher's close friend was attacked in his own shop, which was next to the new settlement in the neighbourhood. Some unknown men had come to the store and told him to close it early instead of at 10pm. The next morning his shop had been damaged by an explosion set in the road. Maher's friend was convinced that it was the men who visited him the day before, he knew they lived in the new settlement. Maher didn't trust the police so he tried to report the incident to the soldier manning a watchtower at the local American base. "I wanted them to

arrest that group so that the neighbourhood would be secure again. But they didn't want to hear anything so I went home.” The next day he received a threat letter which said: “Leave your work with the pigs or your life will leave you”. But there was no group named on it so he thought it was a prank. The following day news arrived that his friend had been killed: men had fired bullets at the store. Another friend was present; he survived to warn that the attackers had asked about Maher by name. As well as dealing with the tragic loss of a friend, Maher now realised that the threat letter was not a joke. He moved to his paternal aunt's house elsewhere in the city, hoping that he could eventually return home. Unknown men frequently inquired about Maher at his parents' house and one day wrote the phrase *His blood is spilled* on the gate of their house. After seeing the writing on their gate his mother phoned Maher and urged him to leave Baghdad as soon as possible. The threat letter put him in a hard choice situation. He could leave for an uncertain future in Syria, not knowing if he would see his parents again, or remain a prisoner in his aunt's home and face the real possibility of being killed. Maher chose Syria and left with his wife.

We heard earlier from Baan about threats and conflict in her school space. Her parents moved her to a school in a different district of Baghdad, closer to where they lived after deciding to leave their home of 25 years in Al Ghazaliya. Ghazaliya itself had become a “hot zone”. This was a confessionally mixed, sprawling residential area on the western fringe of the capital. It was built on land distributed in the 1960s and 1970s to government employees, including army officers (Harling, 2011: 53). Ghazaliya contained migrants from Anbar province, west of Baghdad. After 2004, the link between Ghazaliya and Anbar increased with the influx of refugees from heavy American Army counter insurgency operations there. It became progressively fused with Anbar province, from where resources flowed to hold off attempts by the Sadrists to purge the area (ibid.). Al Ghazaliya was adjacent to Shu'la, an impoverished and mostly Shia neighbourhood that was a Sadrist and Mehdi Army stronghold: from 2006 there were regular exchanges of mortar fire between armed groups from both areas. Um Ahmed told me that one landed on a neighbour's house, killing a child and maiming the mother. These were coercive circumstances which directed a general sense of threat, indiscriminately, towards all the residents of Ghazaliya. No house was safe from mortars being fired at densely populated urban areas. Remaining in Ghazaliya now carried this risk with it.

She and her family felt increasingly vulnerable in the neighbourhood. They were Shias in a mixed area where Sunni militants were gaining the upper hand. Mortars did not discriminate, but Abu Omar Al Baghdadi's militia did. They were part of Al Qaida in Iraq – they loathed Shias and posted anti-Shia slogans and threats in the neighbourhood. The hostility in the neighbourhood space intensified.

Wherever we'd go, we'd see posters on the walls: “Get out you dissenters” They called us Shias *dissenters*.¹⁷ “Get out you infidels” and I don't know what else, “whoever stays will have their house burned down”. That would be on the streets. Underneath it would say Abu Omar Al Baghdadi's Brigade. We felt afraid seeing these things written on the walls. Wherever you'd go, you could see them.

This constituted a general threat to Shias living in Ghazaliya. These posters took on added meaning in a state of violence – they were threats that had been carried out against Shia families already. The pressures on Um Ahmed's family were growing. One day, armed men boarded Baan's school bus and threatened to take her away because she was the only girl not wearing a headscarf. She tried to cover it with the curtain of the bus window. The driver begged the men not to take her, kissing the hand of one until he agreed not to take Baan away. She escaped that time but she would often see armed men hiding in the side streets on her way home from school. Her older brother Ahmed would be out on the street in the evenings with his friends and would observe the events around them. One day Ahmed saw a family gunned down in their car. At night, armed men would ask Ahmed and his friends why they weren't carrying rifles: “People from Shu'la are coming to get you”. It was unclear who these armed men were – they may have belonged to Al Qaida and may have been responsible for the anti-Shia slogans. What was clear was that their visible activities added to the coercive proposals already presented to her family on account of their living in a “hot zone”. Living in Al Ghazaliya posed a risk to her children of being accosted by armed men.

Um Ahmed was becoming more and more anxious about remaining in Ghazaliya and wanted the family to leave on their own terms. Despite being a strong and independent woman, she could not persuade her husband to agree. The actions of a sinister neighbour would change that. Abu Fareed didn't like Shias yet he would visit Um Ahmed's house. Baan told me that:

¹⁷ Dissenters in the sense that the Shias are accused of being heretics, rejecting the example of Sunni Islam.

He didn't want Shia families on the street, ... But he used to like my Dad ... and he used to say: "You're different, you're not very Shia".

Abu Fareed felt differently about another Shia family on the street who originally hailed from Najaf in southern Iraq. One night, one of Ahmed's friends saw Abu Fareed place a note at their house. When they quickly fled it was clear he had dropped them a threat letter. The family returned only for him to place another. After the second letter they did not return. From July 2006 the Shia families on their street were leaving one by one. Ahmed and his friends listened as news would come of each family's departure, presumably after receiving a threat letter or feeling coerced in another way. They did not know if Abu Fareed had a role in each incident. Baan's father, Hesham, did not believe there was good enough reason for them to leave Ghazaliya until December 2006 when they became the last remaining Shia family on the street. Um Ahmed had wanted them to leave sooner - she feared receiving a threat and having no control of their move elsewhere – but her husband resisted. Once he had agreed, she and her son began loading the car with their belongings. They did this in secret to avoid drawing attention to themselves and their imminent move. Hesham would then drive Baan to school in the morning and then go to his parents' home and unload the car. Ahmed had heard of a Shia family whose belongings were torched as they moved out of the area. Within ten days they had transferred all but the largest pieces of furniture and kitchen appliances to Hesham's relatives' home in a less violent part of Baghdad.

Hesham perceived the situation differently to Um Ahmed – she understood that they were in a hard choice situation before he did. In fact she told me that they may not have moved at all – without receiving a direct threat – had it not been for her own efforts. Her husband was not present when I interviewed Um Ahmed but I sensed he was part of what Langellier (2001: 174) refers to as the “ghostly audience” - the story was being told for his benefit as much as mine, she wanted him to appreciate how much she had done to remove their family from the imminent dangers in Ghazaliya. To her the hard choice was clear: remain in their home and face the danger of mortar fire, armed men, and the risk of having to abandon their home and belongings abruptly should a militia threaten them – or leave their home in a manner closer to their choosing, even if it entails uncertainty in another neighbourhood in Baghdad. This hard choice situation was imposed on Um Ahmed's perception of events after a process of

intensifying threats and constraints, each one adding to the pressure to move – certainly in the eyes of Um Ahmed.¹⁸

Shortly after they left Ghazaliya, they went to Syria for a few months. Baan's older sister, Belsem, needed complicated surgery on her spine. The flight of doctors and the steep deterioration in the healthcare system led her to Syria where the Red Crescent also helped pay for the operation.¹⁹ This was another type of displacement resulting from the invasion's death blow to Iraq's health care infrastructure after years of deterioration under sanctions. Belsem could not find the healthcare she needed in Iraq. Baan accompanied her mother and sister to Syria. After the family returned to Iraq, Um Ahmed wanted them to have their own place to live. To avoid the risks associated with making long journeys in the city she rented an apartment in a relatively secure Sunni neighbourhood close to the school where she taught, but where Shias still lived. When they moved in Um Ahmed was with her sister who made sure to speak in Mosul dialect in earshot of the new neighbours to give the impression that they were Sunnis. She also told me that their family name was commonly associated with Sunnis and that her ID card showed her city of birth in Mosul province.

Twice police raided their house in Ghazaliya while it was empty as a law was imposed stipulating that a house should not remain empty lest terrorists use it to cache explosives. They rented it out at \$100 a month to avoid further raids. Their new apartment cost \$470 a month so their relocation was coming at an expense of \$370 a month, adding financial burden to their displacement. Another law stipulated that any one moving furniture out of a house had to acquire a permit to prove they were the owners and not looters. The neighbours were very supportive. Not only had they acted as witnesses at the police station where Um Ahmed got the permit, but they had twice prevented armed men from taking over her house when it was empty.

They brought my neighbours out of the house at gun point and questioned them about our house. “We heard that house belongs to Shias.” They told them it didn't, it belonged to Sunnis but they'd gone away and they'd be coming back.

¹⁸ I did not interview her husband but his view of events would have been very interesting.

¹⁹ I met other Iraqis who had come to Damascus for treatment. Farah's mother had surgery on her spine in the same hospital in 2010. I met an Iraqi woman who came to Syria for fertility treatment. I was also surprised to learn that a man living in the Kurdish controlled areas had stocked up on medicine while visiting his brother in Syria because he no longer trusted the quality controls of medicine in Iraq.

As the number of forced relocations grew some people devised house swapping strategies for protection.

For example, there's a part of Ghazaliya that's all Shia because it's close to Shu'la, and a part that's all Sunni – the part where we lived. Some people started swapping houses. People understood each other's situation. It wasn't what people wanted. ... For example, Shias living in a Sunni area, if they'd been forced out of their home, they might go to a Sunni house in the Shia part of Ghazaliya and say: "Look, we're Shias we'll stay in your house, you're Sunnis, you stay in our house. We'll protect your house, you protect ours."

Baan is now studying in the United States but her family remain in Baghdad, displaced in place. She told me that they never left because of the potential economic risk. Her father collects a state pension but as it is not enough to sustain her parents, her mother's income from teaching is needed. Their house in Ghazaliya is now empty and they are considering selling it to build a house in a different part of Baghdad or buy an apartment in Jordan or Lebanon. Um Ahmed told me that she was losing her patience with the tribulations of daily life in Iraq, fed up of seven years without a regular electricity supply. She and her husband had both spent time living in Syria with Baan as she prepared for her scholarship application. They had grown used to a secure environment with adequate public services. Circumstances require of them that they lie about their religious affiliation, and that is clearly not a desirable situation for them.

Threats in the neighbourhood accumulated and coerced the family to leave. Um Ahmed was the driving force in the decision to leave but her husband had the final say. They did not start packing their belongings until he had agreed to it. The neighbourhood became a hostile space. The social relations changed. Sectarian slogans notified the Shias that there was an armed group in the neighbourhood actively working to expel or kill them. One neighbour, Abu Fareed, had threatened another Shia family, even though he had no bad feeling towards their own household. Not all of the relations changed and became hostile but the activities of militias overruled the work of their unarmed neighbours. Mortars were falling in the street close by and one by one Shia families left the street until they were the last ones. The decisions of others to leave before them added to their growing feelings of insecurity. They

assumed they would eventually be threatened and wanted to have more control of their move to another neighbourhood in order to protect their belongings. As the pressure increased, they were faced with a hard choice of little scope. Remaining came with the risk of death of a family member, and the chance that they would be expelled from the neighbourhood with little time to take their belongings. Leaving would give them more control of the move, and lessen the dangers to family members, but leave them in an uncertain situation. They decided to leave - a financially burdensome decision but better than losing a relative.

In the desert of western Iraq, about 30km from the city of Fallujah, lies a *mujamma'* - a residential compound that once housed workers from three nearby military industrial projects. Bessaam's father was a mechanical engineer who worked on missile design and construction and lived in the compound. Its modern housing had a 24 hour electricity supply, unlike the rest of Iraq before 2003. The military project where his father worked was 10km away from the confessionally mixed *mujamma'*. Bessaam's father had worked there for over 15 years and was thus entitled to ownership of the apartment where they lived. There were three residential blocks in the compound and in the centre was a mosque and a market. A ditch and fence separated the compound from the rest of the desert and there were armed guards at the only entrance point. Due to the sensitive nature of the work, entry to the compound was restricted and tightly controlled even for visiting relatives. Nomads from the surrounding desert were forbidden from entering to buy or to sell their goods. Before 2003 this self-contained modern settlement in the desert was safe and secure. Afterwards it underwent immense transformation.

Bessaam explained that for the nomads and for lower grade workers in the compound, the war and collapse of the state represented an opportunity to seize properties for themselves. He believed that sectarianism was used as a cover by these "outsiders" to steal homes and cars inside the *mujamma'*. The American army was not interested in providing security for this modern village in the desert, only in extracting information from the military projects' directors who were never seen again after being taken away by American soldiers. After the CPA abolished the Iraqi police force as part of the purge of the former regime²⁰, the residents of the *mujamma'* formed their own security patrols, much like in Raz's neighbourhood. Fortunately there were no immediate confrontations. The problems began when the police were reformed. The vetting was poor, as it was with police recruitment across the country

²⁰ See Chapter 3.

after 2003 (Harling, 2011) and Bessaam blamed the security problems on the new recruits. The police, he said, were conniving with gangs to steal the new cars coming into the country after 2003.

Police collusion in car theft became clear after the whole local police department was arrested by the Fallujah province police, the *baladiya*, early in 2004. New recruits were brought in, many from outside the *mujamma'*. Security improved a little but the compound was still a coveted prize in the desert. One day seven young police officers were killed at the security gate by gunmen. Bessaam argued that it was not a political incident, it was: "about controlling, taking control. It was part of the plan to take control of the houses there." The deteriorating security situation in the *mujamma'* issued a coercive proposal to all of its residents: remain at the risk of armed robbery, or abandon their homes to face uncertain living conditions elsewhere.

This plan included the use of exemplary sectarian violence to vacate properties where Shia residents lived whilst sending a clear message of threat to Shias who remained. One day an announcement telling Shia residents to leave within 48 hours was made with the loudspeakers of the mosque. The announcers had killed the minister of the mosque for refusing to make the announcement himself and three Shia men were killed the same day. This act of exemplary violence was an explicit coercive proposal directed at all the residents of Shia origins, and implicitly at any others who did not cooperate with the armed men making intrusions into the compound. This happened in early 2004. Some residents had nowhere to go and remained. Bessaam's family soon left the *mujamma'*. In addition to the threat announced to all the Shias, his father received a personal threat to his family. Men claiming to be from the Resistance asked his father to build a missile launching base for them but he refused.

Did they come to your house?

Yeah, ... there were three people. We knew them, they were from the *mujamma'*. ... They said "we are working for the resistance" but my Dad didn't believe them. My Dad refused. ... So they said "we will come back, we will give you a second chance, we are not going to do anything, but watch your kids". ... And they left. A week later we just grabbed our stuff and moved.

His father forbade him and his siblings from leaving their apartment that week, at the end of which they fled the *mujamma'* saying goodbye only to very close friends. Leaving was very difficult for Bessaam, despite the murders taking place near his home. It was a hard choice situation for his father. He knew that leaving their home would mean abandoning it to the armed men that were taking over the compound but remaining meant risking the lives of his children as well as his own.

The men his father recognised were once low ranking members of the former regime's intelligence services and were taking advantage of the lawless post-invasion environment. Bessaam and his family went to stay with his grandparents in Babil. He and his siblings were refused entry into school. "They said 'you've come from Fallujah, you are Saddam's agents' and 'now you've become the terrorists, we can't accept your children in our school'." They belonged to a well known Shia clan from Babil but their ID cards stated they were from Fallujah, a site of heavy resistance to the occupation. Two months later they moved to Syria after being put into another situation of hard choice. Leaving for Syria meant facing economic uncertainties but remaining in Iraq ensured that the children would not receive an education and possibly faced other threats. They remained in contact with people from the *mujamma'*: that is how they learned that by 2005 all the Shias and Christians had fled and by 2007 nearly all of the original Sunni inhabitants had fled too. Bessaam believed that the "outsiders" were not just nomads. They also consisted of low grade employees from the compound colluding with criminals they knew from their towns of origin: "They made deals to kill, kidnap, and confiscate houses."

Breaches to the integrity of Bessaam's residential community of around 20,000 people living and working together in the desert compound began immediately after the occupation. Security deteriorated but they did not want to leave; they had no other place to go and this had been their home for over 15 years. But when his father received a coercive proposal he was put in a hard choice situation. He could stay and make missile bases as ordered to by people who he felt were criminals. If he did not make the bases and remained, his children were likely to be harmed. Even if he had constructed the missile bases he may still have fallen victim to an ostensibly sectarian murder. Leaving entailed the possible loss of the apartment he had earned from 15 years of government service. All of the proposals were unpalatable: his choice was made under duress. The family left for Babil but they realised that living there

would mean forfeiting Bessaam and his younger brother's schooling. Despite their well known Shia family name, their Fallujah ID card had become a "terrorist" label in the mostly Shia province. So what other potential threats awaited them? Should they stay in Babil, forfeit schooling, and risk worse outcomes? They decided under duress to leave for a different uncertainty in Syria. Fortunately for them it was to be a good decision.

Socially fortuitous wartime migration

A decision to leave at a time of war, even if taken under duress, can be socially empowering and therefore classed as socially fortuitous wartime migration (Lubkemann, 2008). The wartime migration of Bessaam and his father can be seen as socially fortuitous, though they did lose the apartment they had in the *mujamma'*. On the advice of their only relative in Syria, Bessaam's father applied to work for the Syrian government. He had a highly specialised engineering skill. After a fortnight he was hired to work in north west Syria where the wages were low but accommodation was provided for free, as it had been in the *mujamma'* in Iraq. His co-workers advised him to seek employment in the private sector and he successfully did so after two months, earning enough money to build a house for his elderly parents in Babil. His father briefly returned to Babil but could not stand the endemic level of corruption. With his high earnings in Syria he paid for Bessaam to acquire the same specialist technical qualification as he had from an institute abroad. In Syria Bessaam was able to earn \$1,000 a month with a private company, even though he was not an engineer or a university graduate.

Bessaam then signed up with a non-government, non-profit agency based in the United States and in Damascus which helps Iraqi students to apply for scholarships for undergraduate studies in the United States. The agency applies to individual universities for scholarship waivers and full maintenance grants on behalf of each student. Bessaam acquired a scholarship to study in the United States. They did lose the apartment they had in the *mujamma'* but were able to earn enough to build a new house in Babil. The future prospects of his younger brother and sister are uncertain, especially with the deteriorating situation in Syria but the family unit arguably has better long term prospects now. Had they remained in Iraq their social and economic prospects could be worse. The education system is far from being restored to its pre-sanctions level and a government worker's salary is in the region of \$500 a month. It is far from certain what kind of work his father could have been doing in Iraq.

Other students I interviewed also acquired scholarships to study in the United States. Farah, Mohsin, Raz, Sara and Baan made successful applications and are now reading for their degrees in the United States. They will receive an education superior to anything available to them in Iraq. Farah had always wanted to study abroad. The corruption and nepotism in the institute in which she studied in Baghdad made her more determined to find opportunities for study abroad. However, it is something she told me she had intended to do regardless of the occupation. The agency in Damascus allowed her to realise that dream.

Baan expressed frustration at the Iraqi university system which, she said, never encouraged creativity: only one professor she knew bucked the trend by deviating from the curriculum. Jasim found the school system frustrating too. He told me of a teacher who gave him a zero because he solved a maths problem with an equation that differed to the one in the textbook. Baan also dreamed of studying abroad, partly to escape the restrictions that Iraqi society imposed on women. She loathed the unfair restrictions it imposed on women but not on men.

Guys can just go places by themselves and just hang out and we can't. We always have someone to drive us, always with us. And also in education, my neighbour got married and just stopped going to school. I hated that society.

Graduating from an American university will provide better social opportunities than graduating from an Iraqi one and can therefore be seen as socially fortuitous and potentially empowering. While in the United States she will also be free from the restrictions Iraqi society imposed on her as a young woman.

These bright students may even become providers for their families but the benefits must not be exaggerated. Their wartime migration has been socially fortuitous only to a limited extent. Sara lost her father and her family cannot return to their home in Baghdad. Jasim lost his father, and Mohsin lost a close neighbour. Raz's family still feel it is not safe enough to return to Iraq and, like Mohsin's family, are living through uncertain times in Syria. Baan's family was forced to relocate within Baghdad and perhaps her family has lost the least from this group of students. On the societal and national level all the students were aware of the enormous amount of damage caused by the invasion and occupation, adding to the problems

inflicted by sanctions in the 1990s. They expressed desire to help the country on its road to recovery, some determined to return and re-construct. It remains to be seen whether Iraq will be a place that will welcome and allow them to do so.

The depletion of kinship networks and its effects on migration

The flight of close family members can be a coercive pressure on those who do not leave. Remaining becomes less and less appealing with each depletion of family and kinship networks. Taking the choice to remain can mean a choice to remain isolated from the family. If the social relations that comprised the living space disappear then a person's attachment to that space is weakened.

Jasim's family became fragmented as, one by one, a sibling left the country. First his brother left for the UAE because of security concerns. From there he pressured the family to leave Iraq, fearing that Jasim would be kidnapped as the son of a doctor. Then his sister married an Iraqi resident in Jordan: they chose not to remain in Iraq because of organised crime and violence. The migration of his sister and the presence of other relatives in Syria facilitated their relocation. But Jasim's migration can also be understood as part of the cumulative depletion of family relations that made his family feel attached enough to Iraq to remain there. After the second explosion in his school his parents abruptly decided it was time to leave Iraq. That was in September 2006. There was a discussion about whether to go to Jordan or Syria. They consulted relatives in both countries and chose Syria for its lower cost of living, free schooling, and kinder residency system than Jordan's. Their relatives outside Iraq affected their decision to leave, but so too did those who stayed. Jasim's parents had intended their migration to be temporary, until the violence would recede in Iraq. They were in regular contact with his sister and neighbours in Baghdad and monitored the situation. His parents returned briefly to Iraq to arrange for their pensions to be collected, to see his one remaining sibling in Baghdad, and also to inspect their home after neighbours informed them that their house had been raided - but they did not know by whom. Tenants have lived there ever since.

Farah's eldest sister had worked for an NGO that helped Iraqis receive medical treatment abroad which was unavailable in Iraq. She later worked for an American newspaper's bureau in Baghdad. The security situation had declined to the point at which Iraqis who had worked

for any foreign organization were under threat. She applied for family resettlement with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) intending for the whole family to relocate somewhere safe abroad. The IOM split the family in two by granting resettlement only to her two older sisters. Separation was added to the list of displacements the family had experienced. It is also interesting that the effect of Farah's relatives leaving, and suffering for it, consolidated her father's already risk averse nature and reduced the likelihood of their migration. He would not accept any risky relocations and was the final decision maker in the household. Their attempt at less risky migration through the IOM had failed. Their family was separated. Farah and her younger sister are today studying in the United States but her parents remain in Baghdad with her younger brother in an increasingly vulnerable position. This can be understood as displacement in place, a loss of resources for those who are unable to move, enduring involuntary immobility (Lubkemann, 2008).

Yousif told me about the macabre stories circulating about the kidnapping of Christians. Huge ransoms would be demanded for daughters taken hostage. Kidnappers were known to return bodies, murdered after being raped, even if a ransom was paid. His paternal aunt was among many of Yousif's relatives who left Iraq. They began leaving in 2005: "My father's paternal cousins, my maternal uncles, my paternal aunt. My paternal aunt was not the first but left just after the first ones. Most of them came here to Syria." The decisions of those who left impacted on their relatives who remained. Extended family members who left Iraq helped others to join them.

My paternal cousin left, for example. He got there and told me he'd worked, he was studying and within a year or two he'd made something of himself. ... So he was encouraging me to leave, his name's Ameer and he likes to be helpful. He said come here and we'll help you. With most of our relatives it was like that. Will you help us if we leave? Leave! One helps the other, he helps another, and then our relatives there [in Iraq] had run out because they were getting lots of help from the relatives abroad.

The pattern he described was that of cumulative causation. Those who make the initial journeys make the path easier for future migrations. As more and more relatives went, the easier it became for those who remained in Iraq to leave. Nearly all of Yousif's relatives now live in Australia, and all of them have offered to help his family join them. Most of them left

in 2005 and 2006, and by 2008 only his nuclear family, and his uncle, remained in Baghdad.

If you saw our situation in Baghdad now, you'd see that we don't have anybody to visit during *Eid*. I don't have a single relative in Baghdad now. Well, there's my uncle the priest but I see him just once. But he doesn't have any children, he's not married because he's a priest. But there aren't any relatives who are like my friends, my age, who can be like your brothers and sisters. That's something we're really missing. The majority of our relatives are in Australia and Canada. ... How can we build families if our relatives are not around?

Yousif's family had an uncle living in the north of Iraq but moving there was undesirable. He told me of discrimination against people who spoke Arabic and not Kurdish. There was little chance of finding work there without patronage from:

... one of their parties.²¹ What then if you don't want to join one of their parties? Have we gone back to Saddam's ways then? We've had this war to get rid of that kind of behaviour.

Yousif told me that his family had wanted to leave Iraq and reunite with relatives abroad but his father reasoned it to be too risky a venture. Their extended family abroad were phoning them regularly, trying to persuade them to leave and assuring them that they would support them financially if they needed it.

My father ... he'd say "what if ... we didn't have enough money? Are we going to call everyone in the world [the family] and say we need money for it?" ... It's not easy to call people and ... ask them to send you money, it's degrading.

Cumulative causation has the effect of prompting migrations among those who remain, and can do so in a coercive fashion. Yousif experienced a depletion of social resources that provide him and his nuclear family with psycho-social support. It also seemed as if this was happening in other Christian families he knew from his local church. "All of a sudden you'd hear that so-and-so was leaving. ... Three quarters of my friends from the church are [now] in Europe or in America and Canada." Yousif's father was unwilling to risk becoming

²¹ He is referring to the two dominant political parties that control the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. The Kurdish Democratic Party is ruled by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan is ruled by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

financially dependent on his extended family abroad. The Christians in Baghdad are dwindling in numbers. They have experienced displacement in place through the depletion of the social relations that form their extended family and religious community.

The church in Yousif's neighbourhood tried hard to persuade the congregation to stay but would also help those who had decided to leave.

They would say things like “ ... don't think of leaving because this country is ours, we've been here longer in this country. We shouldn't think to go and leave everything.” ... With some people, it goes in one ear and straight out of the other, they don't pay any attention. Some people were persuaded to remain.

In addition to mass, there were also lectures aimed at young men, to encourage them to be active in society and to remain in Iraq. They would say things like:

“If you leave, and then another leaves, who's going to rise? Who's going to get the country back on its feet again? It's going to stay in the hands of those who are messing up the country, and the country will stay messed up, in a state of ruin.” But I was young when I was at the church, I remember that we didn't really take those words seriously. When you're a teenager you just want to enjoy yourself. ... But then when you grow up, you become more aware, you realise that what they were saying was right.

The priests were also able to provide supporting documentation for Christians who wished to emigrate. Yousif did not know what this was exactly as his family had never attempted to leave Iraq. The role of his church was advisory but did not seem decisive.

Yousif lived close to his church in the area around Waathiq square. It was a quiet middle class Christian neighbourhood where foreign diplomats had also lived. His family lived there for eleven years in different rented houses. From 2005 to 2010 they lived in the home of a family friend, a doctor who fled for Jordan with his family after a relative was kidnapped in 2005. They trusted them enough to allow them to live in the house without paying rent, but not enough to give them much information about their departure.

You wouldn't have thought that they were going to leave or that they had any intention to migrate. It was a surprise to us when the father came and said "here take the keys and move into our house and look after it".

This was typical of the decision to leave: it would be taken within the nuclear family, and few others, if anyone, would know about it until it had been decided. Adnaan, whose story we heard in Chapter 4 did not even give his brother an exact address after he moved within the city. He feared his brother's wife would accidentally mention it in a situation that could put his family in danger. There was also the fear of being robbed. Households who believed that criminal gangs and militias were operating in the area feared that news of their departure would attract hostile attention from these groups. A household on the move was more vulnerable to robbery. Yousif didn't mention any militia activity in his neighbourhood and nothing of the kind that took place in Farah's area. But he did experience the same collapse in public services that millions of others in the city endured. There was no reliable supply of electricity from the national grid, the water supply was infrequent and not potable: "You have to chase after services, they don't come to you. There's very little water. You have to get electricity going so that you can power the water pump so that you can draw some water." Electricity on the street was supplied by two private generator owners. They would run cables to houses on the street for a tidy profit.²²

How much did you used to pay?

One of them cost 70,000 dinars, about \$60 a month. The other generator cost 80 or 90,000 dinars but it had more amperes. One would work in the morning and the other from the afternoon until the night. ... Those two generators would keep us supplied. Sometimes the supply from the street generators would cut out and we would switch on our house generator.

As a teacher, his mother's salary is around \$600 a month. His father works as a freelance electrician: his income is irregular. His mother spends over 20% of her salary on street generator payments. He and his brother work to supplement the family income. In this new age of wretched public services, the roads where he lived fared poorly too. He said that a

²² Recent hikes in fuel costs have made it a less profitable venture. See Radwan and Marques (2012) *Generator Man*, a recent documentary about a man in one of Baghdad's poor neighbourhoods who runs a neighbourhood generator.



Figure 12 (above) Generator wires criss-cross a Baghdad street, 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati).



Figures 13 & 14 (left and right): Generator wires blemish the streets of Baghdad in 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati).
Figure 15 (middle): A small private generator sits in the garden of a house in Baghdad, 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati).

section of road was dug up to lay pipes but remained open for two years before it was repaired. I saw photographs of Yousif wearing plastic bags on his shoes one rainy day to prevent his shoes and trousers from being completely mud soaked before reaching the top of his street.

Yousif's family remain displaced in place. Public services in their neighbourhood are woeful, like they are in most of the capital. They have to spend a considerable amount of their income on electricity alone, in a country sitting on the second largest known reserves of oil. More importantly, their relatives have nearly all gone, as have many of their Christian friends in the city. They have experienced a heavy depletion of their social resources but the risk of financial dependency after migration is one Yousif's father does not believe is worth taking. Yousif's story also tells us about the active but not decisive role of the church in migration decisions. His displacement in place continued with the tragedy that struck his church late in 2010, some months after he left Syria. A group of terrorists stormed the church and massacred dozens of worshippers. The death toll increased after a botched intervention by government security forces. Yousif told me, after I interviewed him, that he lost many friends in the attack. Still, he and his family remain in Baghdad.

Conclusion

Forced migration decisions and displacement processes can be better understood if coercion is properly examined. I have mobilised Wertheimer's (1989) concept of coercive proposals and hard choices and identified ways in which they have been presented to agents by changes in their physical and social spaces. Agents value a range of different baselines and coercive transformations of different spaces can jeopardise these baselines to a point at which a decision to leave is taken. The displacement experiences in this chapter all involved intrusions of threat into important social spaces. The social relations that comprised these spaces changed, as did the power relations within them. The threats in the school spaces were sometimes physical, lethal threats. In other cases they were threats to the key social life project of educational advancement as power relations changed in a way that made the school space a site of sectarian exclusion. Threats appeared in the neighbourhood space too. When threats are only to property, they are manageable, even if they involve doorstep violence. They still form a pressure to leave but it is when threats become personal, lethal threats to the life of a family member, that the threat is most likely to translate into forced migration. In Raz's case

the neighbourhood formed a safe haven of sorts, protected from militias by the Resistance and an armed neighbourhood watch. But being confined to the neighbourhood after his father narrowly escaped from the Mehdi Army in his workplace was a threat to their livelihood. They had no safe space in which to generate an income, the neighbourhood effectively became a prison and it was time to leave for Syria.

The gendered nature of displacement was evident in these narratives. Men were the decision makers again and even in Um Ahmed's case where she had a strong role in moving, her husband had the final say. Men were more at risk of violence in these case studies mostly because of their roles as breadwinners and protectors. It seems that women were not *expected* to work if it entailed danger, so long as there was a man in the household capable of doing so. Of course many households did send women out to work – the assassinated shopkeeper close to Anwar's stall was a woman and Um Ahmed continued to support her family by working as a teacher. But the women were also not expected to guard their neighbourhoods at night with rifles. There was a greater fear of women being targeted for sexual violence – Yousif related stories he had heard about women being attacked in Dora as part of strategies of forced population movement. There are countless other stories of this taking place across the city. Young women like Farah and Baan had their overall freedom of movement restricted because of such fears. Farah's congregation advised the young Christian women to dress more conservatively to avoid attention from militias. The girls in Baan's whole school had to wear headscarves but she complained that the same restrictions did not apply to young men. Gender and communal identity intersected with Um Ahmed. She was able to drive her car alone in certain parts of the city – she was not seen as a threat and she did not feel threatened in many neighbourhoods because she could pass for either a Sunni or a Shia Muslim. In the next chapter we shall hear that Mandaean women, from Hadi's family, were not able to drive alone but the resources at the family's disposal allowed them to mitigate the constraints for some time. The intersection of gender, confessional association and material resources affected their experiences of displacement.

I have shown how the flight of a person's social networks can coerce agents to leave. The most significant is the family network but networks in the religious community and in the neighbourhood are also important. Familiar neighbours can provide a sense of security and

their departure can create a feeling of insecurity, particularly during a time of social and political upheaval. But even though a family unit is under coercive pressure to leave, decision makers may not have the material resources to migrate as this can entail economic insecurity. The experiences of Farah and Yousif show how a lack of resources can immobilise a family to a considerable extent. Both their fathers were risk averse and it is no coincidence that both families did not own properties. Broadly speaking they could be categorised as part of Iraq's middle class but this was a class which had been impoverished by 13 years of sanctions. They were therefore not part of Iraq's *monied* class and this, I believe, is what made their fathers risk averse. In the next chapter the stories of Hadi and Shaykh Rami, from families of goldsmiths, will contrast with these stories in terms of the resources at their disposal.

This observation about resources can be linked to another about cumulative causation in forced migration. Massey (1990) noted that migration alters the context within which others make future decisions about migration. The presence of migrants in a destination can facilitate further migration to it. He also noted that feedback mechanisms encourage further migration. An example he gave was that of Mexican migrants returning to their rural towns after profitable work in the USA and spending money on cars and property. This pressured those who had not worked in the USA to do so in order to alleviate their new sense of relative deprivation. In the forced migration context of Iraq, Marfleet (2007) commented that those who left devalued the psychosocial resources of the people who remained, pressuring them to leave. As I have shown already, cumulative causation can coerce those who remain into a decision to leave. This may be because they cannot complete key social life projects in a depleted social world or because being separated from communal networks fosters insecurity. What can also be said about cumulative causation is that there are negative feedback mechanisms which *discourage* migration. As information feeds back about unsuccessful journeys of others, journeys which did not lead to resettlement in Western countries and which drained the limited financial resources of a family unit, decision makers with similarly limited resources become even less inclined to take the risk of migration. Cumulative causation can coerce agents into leaving, but also into remaining.

Displacement has many aspects and can be a complicated process. Transformations of spaces can feel threatening to some but not to others. When threats appear in the neighbourhood

space, they act as coercive pressures that restrict choice. These may come in the form of threatening posters and graffiti sprayed in public places. A household may be able to endure the presence of some level of threat. However, threats can accumulate to the point at which they present a decision maker with highly circumscribed proposals of which relocation is the least unpalatable. When many of the physical and social spaces in an agent's world come to contain threats, the agent faces a coercive landscape. The situations of Raz, Maher, and also Um Ahmed in Al Ghazaliya gave us some idea of what the coercive landscape can be like. Um Ahmed was able to escape the multiple threats in Al Ghazaliya by moving to a different part of the city and by pretending to be a Sunni Muslim. Raz's father perceived threat in every part of Baghdad outside his neighbourhood. Maher did not even have a safe neighbourhood in the city. In the next chapter I present the experiences of coercive transformations of space, of the accumulation of multiple threats and episodes of constraint in a longitudinal way. I shall use Mandaean and Palestinian case studies to show how members of Iraq's minorities experienced displacement. Hadi's story will show us what it was like to be targeted for being an outspoken Civil Society activist and a Mandaean community figure. He dared to challenge the new order and was forced out of Iraq by an accumulation of specific attacks and general threats from the growing coerciveness of his physical and social world. Shaykh Rami shall explain the restrictions to religious freedoms the Mandeans experienced as well as the tragedy visited upon his family by those who colluded with police to rob their gold store. Abu Waleed will tell us more about the Palestinian experience in a state of violence and how he navigated the coercive landscape before escaping from it for the sake of his family's safety.

Chapter 6

Minority experiences of displacement

In the following pages I mobilise case studies from Mandaean Iraqis and the Palestinians of Iraq, both minority groups whose sense of vulnerability increased in the aftermath of invasion and state collapse. Their narratives overlap with issues raised in previous ones: purges, neighbourhood transformations, the depletion of what Sen (1999) refers to as people's instrumental freedoms and how these factors affect decisions in times of crisis. The effects of cumulative causation are present again. However, their identity as Mandaeans and as Palestinians shaped their displacements in specific ways which I shall make clear in the coming pages.

I continue to demonstrate how the conceptual framework I outlined in Chapter 1 can better explain the process of displacement and how it can eventually lead to a forced migration decision. Coercive proposals came to permeate the social and physical spaces in the lives of Iraqis in this chapter and threatened valued baselines along the way. In the last chapter I arranged the experiences around the component spaces of daily life which eventually became a coercive landscape. Here I present specific perspectives of Mandaeans and Palestinians, and in a more longitudinal way to give an enhanced sense of the evolving coercive landscape. I show how the aggregation of threats eventually imposed a “hard choice” situation (Wertheimer, 1987) upon decision makers: leave Iraq for uncertainty in Syria or remain and face lethal threats.

Again, the displacements here occurred inside what Harling (2011) calls “a state of violence” - as opposed to a state of law.¹ The post-invasion Iraqi state could not “provide peaceful mechanisms for addressing political conflicts, to form a common frame of reference, and to enforce its monopoly over the use and legitimization of violence” (Harling, 2011: 45). This situation of generalized and indistinct insecurity was created by three interrelated processes: an exclusionary post-2003 political process; sectarian differentiation; and the privatisation of violence: the security vacuum, caused by state collapse, was filled by militias, mercenaries,

¹ See Chapter 3 and Harling (2011).

gangs, and insurgent groups (Harling, 2011: 45-48). The Shia Al Askari shrine in Samarra was bombed in February 2006 and triggered intense violence in Baghdad which peaked during 2006 and 2007. Although it abated to some extent in 2008, its legacy continued to affect people's lives in the years afterwards. The pressures of living in a state of violence - where threats permeated and constrained daily life - transformed the environment into a coercive landscape and forced many Iraqis to leave their country altogether. As I have stated already, threat perception is specific, particularly when it relates to an understanding of broader circumstances of threat and not solely to a personal threat letter or bullet delivered in the letter box. This specific nature of threat is particularly salient when it is directed at a reference group. In Chapter 4 I showed how aspiring state actors issued a collective threat to those whom they deemed to belong to the old order, or to represent it symbolically, and they included the Palestinians and Mandeans. In the following pages I expand upon the particular ways in which members of these reference groups understood threat, individually and collectively.

Mandaean stories

Shaykh Rami, a priest and a goldsmith

Shaykh Rami became a priest² in 2008 after being an Ishkanda, or priest's assistant, to his father since the early 1990s. They were also a family of goldsmiths, knowledge passed to the Shaykh from his father. They had run a gold store from a market in Baghdad for over 60 years. This was the same market where in 2008, some children shouted abuse at its Mandaean traders. The Shaykh's family had lived in their Baghdad neighbourhood since the 1970s. After the occupation and the deterioration of security many families departed. The area was confessionally mixed, roughly divided in half between Sunni and Shia families, and relatively poor. The Sunnis mostly lived on the outskirts of the area. The Shias mostly lived in the centre, hailing from Amara in the south of the country. After 2003 the Sunni families fled violence from people who the Shaykh described as “Muqtada's men”³, members of the Mehdi Army. One household lost four sons. Another large Sunni family, consisting of 18 families, fled the area. The Shaykh related how the people who moved into their homes were Shias. There were transformations in his neighbourhood similar to those we heard of in the previous

² The Mandeans refer to their priests as Shaykhs or *rujaal deen* [رجال دين]. I use the terms priest and Shaykh interchangeably in the thesis.

³ This is a reference to the leader of the Sadrists - Muqtada Al Sadr.

chapters. As well as a decline in security and public services, old neighbours were replaced by strangers. Militia men established a visible presence. But these transformations were not the main part of his family's story of forced migration.

The neighbourhood transformation was not the key to understanding why the Shaykh had to leave Iraq. Muqtada's men were active where he worked. One day his friend, a barber in the market, and his sons were beaten with cables in the street. This was after a boy whose father worked in a Mehdi Army office in Kadhimiya had made trouble with the barber's sons. Eventually, the militia would rob the Shaykh's store, killing and wounding several of his relatives and threatening his whole family. We shall come to that later. As with others we have heard from so far, the Shaykh's migration to Syria was part of a process of displacement that began long before his eventual decision to leave.

First though, I shall look at how the religious freedom of the sect as a whole was curtailed, how they were no longer able to practise their faith unharmed. Earlier, the Shaykh spoke of how the looting began close to his home, on the day the regime fell, how it continued and how insecurity grew worse - the violence became generalized in Baghdad. The Mandaeans suffered with other Iraqis. The Mandaean Human Rights Group (MHRG, 2011) has documented murders and other crimes committed against them. Many of these crimes took place during journeys within the city. Mobility was constrained in that it now contained a coercive proposal: travel within the city and face violent attacks, or remain confined to the relative safety of the home. This was a threat which all Baghdadis faced but the Mandaeans felt particularly vulnerable as a non-Muslim group. Haleem told us earlier that his daughter experienced growing sectarian abuse from her school friends after 2003. Attacks on Mandaeans became common where once they were extremely rare. Their priests were not spared:

We have a priest in Basra, Shaykh Mazen who was threatened three times. Recently, the governor of Basra assigned two units to protect him and the temple. One unit is stationed close to the temple and the other near his house ... that's in addition to increasing his personal body guard from four to eight, and increasing the number of police men guarding the temple. But it's not going to help.

Mandaeans depend on their priests to perform fundamental rituals. They are complex and must be supervised by a priest in the ancient Mandaean form of Aramaic. The most important of them is the baptism. A Mandaean is not expected to perform it frequently but it is a mandatory component during birth and marriage which are what Lubkemann (2008) calls “key social life projects”. Without the priests to conduct the rituals, marriages remain on hold, newborns remain unbaptised. This represents a constraint on the Mandaean sect collectively and not just in Basra. Interactions with Shaykh Mazen come with the implicit threat of being caught up in an attack on the Shaykh, so too with the now guarded temple. Attacks on priests and prominent community figures are characteristic of strategies aimed at coercing a population into fleeing by weakening community resources and solidarity (Marfleet, 2006: 245). “The initial targets of such campaigns are usually leading male figures. The more effectively they are removed the more vulnerable becomes the community as a whole” (ibid.). Shaykh Rami told me that there were areas in Iraq which had no priest to serve the faithful. This affected his own duties as a priest. Even before the robbery and the personal threats to his family, he spent a considerable amount of his time away from Baghdad, serving the needs of Sabeans who no longer had a priest close by. Some priests had been killed or fled, or Mandaens would find that no priest lived in their place of refuge. Shaykh Rami spent over a year in northern Iraq in Kirkuk where there was a Mandaean temple without a priest. In Damascus, he served those living in Syria as well as those who had resettled in European countries without a priest.

According to Hadi, who was involved in Mandaean population estimates in the 1990s, and with the Mandaean Association in Damascus, the community in Iraq has shrunk overall and it is not only the priests who have left: before 2003 the Mandaeans were estimated to number between 45,000 and 50,000 but now it is below 6,000. From 2006 to 2007 there were 13,000-14,000 registered at the Mandaean Association in Damascus. This is a problem for a sect that forbids marriage outside of the faith. If their dispersal is sustained, in the long term it is potentially an existential threat.

Living under the circumstances of a state of violence constrained their freedom to practise their faith in other ways. Even in Baghdad where priests remained, it became dangerous to enact their distinctive baptism rituals in the Tigris river which meanders through the city. They had done so safely in the past, under the Jadiriya bridge, but this had changed.

At one point in Baghdad we were told by the head of the sect – and they themselves had been told by officials in the state – that the only people allowed to attend a wedding ritual were the bride and groom. Just the bride and groom, nobody else was allowed to attend apart from the father of the bride and the father of the groom.

We were exposed to gunfire, under the Jadiriya bridge. That happened three times. At the temple we were shot at. It was for our own protection that they limited the number who could attend.

So people attacked you inside the temple?

No, they fired at the temple.

As with the Mandaean in Basra, those in Baghdad had to consider a coercive proposal before partaking in previously routine religious activities: practising their rituals in the river and the temple contained the threat of being shot. The suspension of large gatherings took place in 2008 for three to four months. The Shaykh's own consecration as a priest had to be done in Syria. The rituals involve the priest staying awake for seven days and the people around him have to keep him awake in a celebratory way. But his consecration coincided with the leadership of the sect instructing them to avoid commotion and large gatherings that might draw attention to them.

We told Mandaean families that even on religious occasions, during festivals, that as soon as they completed their rituals, they had to return to their homes.

Wasn't there a place where there was a pool like the one in Jaramana?⁴

There was a place in the temple but there were problems with electricity and water. The water would cut off. It would cut off every two or three days, even if you had electricity and you were running the generators, the water would cut off.

⁴ Jaramana is a suburb south of Damascus where many Iraqis live. It was mostly an agricultural area, farmland owned by Druze Syrians until fairly recently when it experienced a real estate boom, partly stimulated by the influx of Iraqis. There are enclosed outdoor spaces for hire for leisure activities that have swimming pools and smaller free flowing water pools, designed for leisure but suited to occasions of baptism. The Mandaean had hired such a place in Jaramana and I was lucky enough to be invited to watch baptism rituals that included weddings.

Even when there was water flowing, the temple was too small for large gatherings. The Mandaeans were used to having 500 people attend wedding and baptism ceremonies. There would be as many as 150 done in the river, the temple's capacity was around twenty. Hadi told me that there were no such restrictions in the 1990s.

I remember in the past, in the 1990s, they used to practise the rituals there, and there might be 4000 to 5000 people there, if not more. But back then, we were free to do so. People couldn't hurt us then. People used to come and watch us from the bridge, take photographs. Nobody would dare to harm anyone.

People would watch, it was something intriguing for them, they'd never seen anything like it before. They would watch, see how this sect does its rituals in the river, how they did their baptisms. Nobody would harass us then. But now it's dangerous. Someone could come along and throw a hand grenade and kill 50 or 100 people. They can do it easily, killing people is easy in Iraq now, 50 or 100 people might die and nobody will ask about it. They're still present in Iraq today. There are two or three priests in Baghdad and they practise their rituals in the temple, but there are hardly any Mandaeans left in Iraq. There might be 4000 left in Iraq.

These new constraints added to the pressures on Mandaeans remaining in Iraq. Though not in themselves enough to make a person decide to leave, they added to the feeling that Iraq was no longer a place for them to function as Mandaeans. I asked the Shaykh if the priests had tried to influence migration decisions in the community. There had not been attempts in the temples to encourage them to remain as had been in the case of Farah and Yousif's churches, and he explained that:

You couldn't encourage people to emigrate, but at the same time, you couldn't encourage people to stay either. Now, and after the Fall [of Saddam's regime], remaining in Iraq is something that Mandaeans will pay for with their money and their lives. The tax is their money and their lives. That's because there is no place for Mandaeans in Iraq any more.

Hadi, from the Iraqi Minorities Council, added that the Mandaean clergy initially:

... were against emigration because they knew that it would lead to the destruction of the sect. ... but you can't forbid someone from leaving. He'll say to you: then provide me with security, provide me with work. Can you protect me? We couldn't do that. Therefore [the decision to leave] it became an individual issue. If a Mandaean wants to leave you can't tell him not to.

Even the head of the sect, himself a priest, no longer lives in Iraq. Hadi informed me that Shaykh Sattar now lives in Australia and spends a few months of the year in Iraq and Syria attending to the needs of the sect.

At the beginning of the occupation when violence was less general, the Mandeans I interviewed perceived a coercive proposal in which remaining in Iraq came at the cost of exclusion from the political process but not yet with threats to their ability to practise their faith and maintain the integrity of the community altogether, or threats to their lives. In a state of violence the coercive proposal evolved into a hard choice situation where remaining entailed the threat of all of the above. Remain in Iraq and live a life of religious unfreedom, where practising rituals came with lethal dangers and where the decline in the Mandaean population was damaging to marriage prospects. Or, leave and live an uncertain economic situation individually, and face a threat to their collective religious identity altogether. It became a hard choice situation as both of the proposals were unpalatable. The Shaykh and other Mandeans believed that the ancient sect was under threat from the ensuing dispersion.⁵ Marriage outside the community is forbidden. He explained that those who resettled to countries like Sweden found themselves transformed into “a summer sect” as that was the only time rivers were warm enough for baptisms. They knew it would be harder to sustain the interest in the faith of a new generation of Mandeans in the diaspora.⁶ He also told me that those remaining in Iraq had become hesitant to leave after seeing what happened to other Mandeans in the “waiting countries” like Syria and Jordan: their savings dwindled and many were living in, or close to, poverty and with no sign of hope for resettlement in a third

⁵ I attended a discussion at the Mandaean Association in Damascus during January 2011 where many aired the anxieties they had about the future of the community as a diaspora scattered across the continents. Mandaean refugees now living in Australia have expressed fears about cultural extinction within the next few generations. See Nickerson et. al. (2009).

⁶ Mandaean men spoke extensively about this during the discussion. Among the questions they asked were: would their children forget that they were Mandeans as soon as they reached America? Would Mandeans gravitate towards Christian churches in the United States who offered assistance, and greater clarity about their faith than the Mandeans? Would they be able to encourage their children to study Mandaean Aramaic in the diaspora?

country. The security situation in Iraq was coercing many into leaving, but the economic situation of those in Syria and Jordan was simultaneously coercing many into remaining, further compounding their displacement.

For the Shaykh though, it was the deadly robbery at the gold market that resulted in his abrupt departure from the country in 2009. He told me how a gang had planned the robbery some time in advance in collusion with police officers. The police force by this time was known to have been infiltrated by the Mehdi Army. At 9:30am one April morning a gang member shot a nearby army officer. A crowd formed around him and the gang entered the market in the shadow of this distraction. The Shaykh continued:

[The] market has three gates. At each door there descended a gang. The other shops, there was a sweet shop there, and they told them not to interfere. They first approached my nephew, his friend was sitting with him. My nephew put up a fight, but they shot him in the head, two bullets. His friend tried to run away but they shot him. There was gunfire. They would enter the shops, shoot, and then move. There were other men with them carrying bags and they would fill them with the cash and with the gold. My young nephew ran to the police and told them about the gang. The police were just at the top of the street, maybe 500 metres away. They told him “We haven't been ordered to intervene”. It was an ugly crime.

According to Shaykh Rami, the gang stole 28 kilos of gold, and \$125,000 in cash. They killed three of his relatives, and wounded two, one is still disabled by it. The Mehdi Army lacks the same kind of funding from foreign states that the Supreme Council and Da'wa receive (ICG 2006c) and funds itself through robberies and extortion rackets. It has been plausibly compared to mafia groups and crime syndicates in southern Italy (Davis, 2011). This was something not lost on the Shaykh.

These gangs, who supports them? There's nobody to finance them, they're not provided with an income. So where do they get their income from, their livelihood? They live off the people, mostly off the goldsmiths. It's the easiest and quickest and most profitable way. If they rob three [gold] stores, if they steal from three stores and kill people – killing is nothing for them – but if they can take three stores, they can live off that. They will

sacrifice [the lives of others], anything to support their leadership. A sacrifice for which another person will pay the price.

The gang was arrested the next day by a unit of the intelligence services separate from the Iraqi police. His nephews and other witnesses confirmed the arrested men were the culprits. The offenders confessed and revealed details of the plan. Death sentences were expected to be passed on them in court. Despite this and other evidence, they are yet to face a trial. The Shaykh spoke to a Brigadier General in the intelligence services who explained that pressure had been applied on them and the judge in the case. The police officers complicit in the robbery had been released, the robbers themselves were still detained, but two members of parliament, one the Sadrist Bahaa' Al A'raji, were lobbying for their release. As well as losing family members and a substantial amount of gold and cash, it was now clear to the Shaykh that living in Iraq meant accepting the loss of “transparency guarantees” (Sen, 1999:39-40). This type of instrumental freedom allows people to operate on a level of presumption of what they are being offered and can expect to receive in their social interactions. This creates trust and prevents corruption and underhand dealings. When that trust is seriously violated, the lives of many people may be adversely affected (ibid.). The Shaykh had lost trust in the Iraqi police and in the Iraqi state to enforce the law fairly altogether. Again this is something that affected Iraqi society as a whole but was particularly damaging for those like the Shaykh whose livelihoods were in the precious metals trade.

At the wake for his deceased relatives, a group of men turned up and threatened his whole family.

They said that those men are not guilty of anything. They said that they were speaking on behalf of their families. “If anything happens to them, we will hold you responsible.” One of them even said “If they are executed, we won't leave a single one of you alive”. Later, we learned that two of them were senior members of the Mehdi Army, senior leaders.

After this threat, the Shaykh and most of his extended family quickly left for Syria. Neighbours are now living in his house, to prevent it being seized. Their store remains shut. The government recovered some of the gold but has yet to return it. Nobody has been punished for the murders and the robbery.

After 2003, being a Mandaean brought with it dangers and constraints. Less able to practise their faith, their religious freedoms were curtailed by violent threats. Those in the precious metals trade became primary targets with no police force they could trust in to protect them. The Shaykh's family experienced all of these things. His life was disrupted by the need to spend time away from Baghdad to serve the needs of those who had fled to northern Iraq, to Damascus, and beyond. Eventually his family's economic freedom was destroyed by the robbery, and their safety threatened for wanting the culprits to be punished. After a sequence of intensifying pressures, his family were put into a hard choice situation: remaining in Iraq to face certain death, unless they dropped charges against the men who they believed murdered their relatives, or leave for economic uncertainty in Syria, away from their store and properties in Baghdad. Leaving Iraq was the least unpalatable of the proposals but the Shaykh and his family appeared to have enough financial resources to sustain a period in Syria without an income from their gold store. There is also the possibility of renting their store to another trader. Some relatives who were too old to travel to Syria are now living in the family home and should the security situation improve – admittedly not likely in the near future - they have a home and potential source of income in Baghdad. His situation contrasts with that of Majeed in Chapter 4 with no assets to aid his livelihood if he returns to Iraq, and also with Yousif and Farah in the previous chapter whose families did not own their own homes or stores and so did not feel able to take economically risky journeys. However none of them experienced armed robbery or were threatened in the same direct way as the Shaykh and his family were – also related to his resources in that they made him doubly a target.

But it was not only Shaykh Rami's family whose lives were changed by the robbery. After hearing of the crime, the police complicity and the silence of the clerical class in condemning the attacks on the Mandeans, Hadi spoke up in a television interview. He was asked for his opinion about the robbery over the phone by Al Sharqiya satellite news station. He chided the Iraqi police and chastised the Shia clerical establishment in Najaf for their mute response to the fate of the Mandeans. It would lead to the final part of his displacement, his forced migration from Iraq after years of resisting threats and coercive pressures. They had combined to put him in a hard choice situation - he too left Iraq against his will and in circumstances not of his choosing.

Hadi - civil rights activist, goldsmith, and businessman

Hadi was a wealthy man who provided his family with a comfortable life in Baghdad, even during the 1990s at a time of embargo. They lived in a large house in one of Baghdad's better neighbourhoods. He was a well travelled goldsmith and jeweller with a long established store in central Baghdad. It was chosen as one of only four stores in Baghdad to act as official agents for American Express. In Iraq he owned agricultural land, a poultry farm managed by his brother, and a textiles factory. He also ran a trading office in Turkey. From the mid 1990s he gradually diverted his energies more to civil society activities. We heard earlier in Chapter 4 about the success enjoyed in bringing about a Mandaean cultural revival in the 1990s. Hadi would continue his efforts after 2003 as a new political order was forming in the country, elections were held, and a new constitution written. His interest in activism at a time of a general collapse of security meant that he had no income after 2003 and he stopped his business activities altogether. Hadi prioritised making use of new political freedoms over his economic freedoms which now carried the dangers of armed robbery. The 2003 war had thwarted some of the community's earlier achievements. Hadi went on to say that the temple that Saddam had promised them was never built, the prime plot of land by the Tigris is registered to the Mandaeans but lies empty. Their social club and community centre in Zawraa' park was seized by presidential order in 2002. The Iraqi Army used it as a weapons cache and it was subsequently destroyed by American air strikes in 2003 and Hadi told me that they reluctantly accepted a paltry \$80,000 in compensation.

Regime change increased instrumental political freedom for Iraqi society to a limited extent. The Mandaeans and other Iraqis could organise politically and speak about politics with less restrictions than under the Ba'ath regime.⁷ The Mandaeans established the Mandaean Democratic Association (MDA) in 2004 so that they could collectively advocate for their rights as a community at a time when communal politics was the new order of the day. In the insecurity of post 2003, the MDA's membership depleted as professionals were targeted, they fled Iraq, some were killed. Hadi recalled that: "We lost three quarters of the members of the MDA in a month. They all left so we suspended our work." Hadi and others later formed the

⁷ A briefing on the prominent groups and figures of the 2005 election can be found here: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4051977.stm>. A report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) spoke of an expanded media and information landscape in 2003 after the end of the Ba'athi state monopoly on media and communications. Self censorship owing to fear of reprisals from political parties and the Ba'ath was still widespread. Around 200 Iraqi journalists were killed between March 2003 and August 2010 (RSF, 2010: 3-6). Many media outlets had to relocate to Jordan, such as *Baghdad TV* after two of its reporters were killed and 17 injured (RSF, 2010: 12).

Iraqi Minorities Council (IMC) in 2005 with Christians, Yazidis, Fayili Kurds, Shabaks,⁸ Armenians, and Turkomans. They hoped to have a better chance of being properly represented in the constitution writing process if they worked together. International organisations listened to the IMC and funded some of their activities, but the Iraqi politicians drafting the constitution did not. Those writing the new Iraqi constitution rushed the process to produce a weak document that lacked consensus (ICG, 2005).⁹ Despite this, the IMC continued its work but its members found threats coming their way because they were speaking out for minority rights in Iraq. Their duties involved great risk to their lives. Hadi remembered that:

The situation became especially bad in 2005 and 2006. Things were getting worse. We reduced our activities in the IMC because it was hard for us to move. Our work required us to go to the Green Zone and have meetings in Embassies, meetings with foreigners. ... One of us was kidnapped, he was a representative of the Christians. They kidnapped him and took a ransom.

A co-worker of a Yazidi¹⁰ lawyer in the IMC was also kidnapped. Working with the IMC now meant accepting the coercive proposal that exercising his political freedom to organise came with the threat of kidnap. The IMC agreed to rent a house from Hadi's brother to hold meetings. Hadi also offered his gold store, closed for business since 2003, as a meeting place. This was part of a threat evasion strategy which was enhanced by the resources available at Hadi's disposal, such as having discrete private buildings to use for meetings. "We began switching places. Sometimes we would meet in that house, other times we would go to other places. We would choose different places so that we wouldn't be monitored. Meetings and gatherings had become dangerous. They were scary." This threat-evasion strategy seriously constrained his mobility. But Hadi was determined to continue his work and had a strong sense of moral obligation to his sect and the other Iraqi minorities. He placed a premium on using his political freedoms, as limited as they were, to ensure representation for his

⁸ The Shabak community are based in northern Iraq. Taneja (2011) says that around 70% are Shia Muslims and the remainder Sunni. They speak a language that is a mixture of Arabic, Turkish and Persian and some consider themselves to be Kurdish. The Yazidis are also present in northern Iraq and their faith is a syncretic mix of Abrahamic religions as well as Zoroastrianism and Manichean traditions. A section of their community also considers itself to be Kurdish. Members of both groups have been violently attacked since 2003 (Taneja, 2011). For a study of Iraq's different faiths and sects, see Khayoun (2007).

⁹ The constitution making process was exclusionary, much of which was done by an informal forum of Kurdish and Shia leaders. See ICG (2005).

¹⁰ The Yazidis live primarily in the Ninewah province in northern Iraq. Their faith is syncretic and includes elements of Sufi Islam and Zoroastrianism.

community in a pluralistic Iraq. He was a central figure at the IMC and a valued spokesman and appeared on different television channels advocating for Iraq's minorities. The criticisms he directed at the new exclusionary political order brought him trouble, highlighting the limits of political freedoms in post 2003 Iraq. The freedom to organise did not come with the freedom to dissent.

A steady flow of threats came Hadi's way. At first they came by phone. Then they were delivered by word of mouth from his sons in law, both of whom were kidnapped in 2005, each a hostage for four days. In May, his son in law's parents paid a \$70,000 ransom. Threats kept coming even after his release so he left for Dubai that same month. Hadi's second son in law was kidnapped in October, released at a cost to his parents of \$60,000. The kidnappers had passed the message to Hadi to stop his work and to keep quiet, but he refused. These threats formed a coercive proposal in which remaining in Baghdad whilst making use of limited political freedoms was carrying a growing risk to Hadi and his family. Hadi's baselines were the safety of his immediate family and being able to exercise the political freedom to represent his community. It was becoming increasingly difficult to assure both of these baselines – in a state of violence they were becoming mutually exclusive. His mobility in the city was severely constrained, and had to be done with extreme vigilance.

One day in March 2006, Hadi and others were meeting in his store when a car parked outside and exploded.

I used it as a meeting place for a few hours twice a week at certain times. They knew I would be there at certain times, the people I trusted, because the telephones weren't working, communications were messed up.

I was in the shop when the bomb went off and suffered minor injuries. The store is deep, some shards of glass got through but not close enough. After that I stopped using the shop as a meeting place. To this day the glass is still broken, I haven't repaired it, I just locked up the store. I'm still paying fees to the person who owns the building. It's now empty but it is still mine.

The threats were still coming, they continued. But I didn't give them a chance. I didn't stay

in one place. I knew how to protect myself. I wouldn't go to certain places, public places, or places where it was known that certain people would meet. When I went out I wouldn't leave the house at particular times. Some times I wouldn't leave the house for two or three weeks at a time.

Hadi was often a prisoner in his own home, too afraid to leave the house. His movements were heavily restricted. Mobility – even during journeys – came with a lethal threat. Their other regular meeting place was the house rented from his brother. It was only a short drive from Hadi's home, but even that short journey contained threats. The space around his home contained many threats. People died as mortar shells landed on their homes. The Mehdi Army militia took control of his neighbourhood.

You could see that militias had taken control of all the public areas, especially when there were processions for Ashura and the like. The whole area would be filled with flags. The Mehdi Army would cut off traffic.

The American Army had laid concrete barriers where Hadi lived, as they had done so across Baghdad. He believed this was to restrict the mobility of the Mehdi Army. “They cut off the streets, they put concrete blocks down and you couldn’t access all of the streets, except through one entrance.” It reached a point where armed attacks were taking place on a daily basis. People would drive through their street to avoid the heavy traffic of the main road nearby, including government officials who would be easy targets in a gridlock. This meant that roadside bombs would often explode when official convoys drove past.

There would be some sort of assassination incident almost every day on that road. We would hear gunshots every day and go out to find a man killed in his car. His engine would still be running and the car would have climbed the pavement but he was dead. Or we would wake up in the morning and find someone dead, killed in the street. What kind of life is that? Services were zero. You couldn’t do anything. When there was an Ashura procession, the streets would be full of them, convoys. One procession would be followed by another.¹¹ There were drums, chains, lamentations, women and all those things. There

¹¹ Ashura is a significant day in the Shia calendar commemorating the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein. Public processions and lamentations were banned under Saddam's rule. Hadi is probably also referring to the many other days of mourning in the Shia calendar during which the Mehdi Army may have held processions.

was nothing wrong with it but it was over the top. Life became intolerable.

Each time he left the house he had to assess the risk, the coercive proposal evident in the circumstances: remain confined to the house and unable to carry out important political activities, or leave and risk being kidnapped or killed.

Hadi's neighbourhood was confessionally mixed. Christians were harassed by the Mehdi Army who had infiltrated the police. As in Farah's neighbourhood, they were making excuses to enter homes. They would often rob them and, said Hadi's son, with the help of militia men who had infiltrated the police.¹² Women were pressured into wearing head scarves. Kidnappings became regular occurrences. Hadi's wife, Karima, had a friend who suffered.

The Christians – do you remember the woman who used to work in the bank, my friend? They kidnapped her sister. She was pushing her child in a pram in the street. They stopped her and told her that she wasn't allowed to walk in the street any more because she was a Christian and she had to leave.

A neighbour asked Karima to wear a headscarf in public so that people wouldn't know she was Mandaean, she feared for Karima's safety. But she had problems with it:

I would put a scarf on my head but it would keep slipping off, I would keep having to adjust it, straighten it, I didn't know how to wear one. They tie them in a particular way, I don't know how to do it. In the end I just took it off.

At the height of the violence and militia rule of the streets some women, particularly non Muslims, felt it was too dangerous to drive alone. Karima stopped driving altogether, and would pay her neighbour's son to take her daughters to university, to the doctor's, anywhere else they needed to go. "It was because he was a Muslim. He would drive them around so at least if the moment came they would be under his protection." Their family had the resources to pay a driver to allow her to travel in relative safety and temporarily evade threats to her life. But one day Mehdi Army members asked him what he was doing with "the *Subbi* girl"¹³, why

¹² Hadi's son explained that people in the area reported that police would knock on the door, demanding to be let in. Residents that complied were robbed by militia men accompanied by a man in a police uniform and those that did not had their doors broken down and were also robbed.

¹³ *Subbi* is short hand for a Sabean - *saabi'i* – and can be derogatory depending on the manner of its use.

he was taking her to college every day. They had been watching and he feared for himself and their daughter. His daughter's mobility was constrained even further.



Figure 16 (above): Concrete barriers block and disfigure a Baghdad street, 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati).

Figure 17 (below): Litter strewn street, Baghdad neighbourhood 2012 (Sundus Al Bayati).



There were fuel shortages and the Mehdi Army seized control of supplies in their neighbourhood. Their eldest son would queue for hours, sometimes from 3am in the morning until noon. There was no guarantee of a result.

That was for a canister of gas and sometimes they would only half fill it. The Mehdi Army had taken control of the places that produced gas canisters. They also took control of the petrol stations. When the [subsidized] fuel would come from the state, they would take it and sell it for themselves. They would buy it at the state price, for pennies, and then sell

each one for 25,000 Iraqi Dinars.¹⁴

Daily life had become miserable. Karima said that “We wanted to see something good happening, something that would give us hope that things were going to get better, but there was nothing.” To which Hadi added:

There was no electricity, no water. The water that came, if it did, would be filthy. The air was polluted. There was rubbish in the streets, and the stench killed you. Diseases started to spread, we were afraid. ... Each day would be worse than the last. They were wretched days. ... That was on top of all the threats that were coming our way

Social opportunities (Sen, 1999: 39) are a category of instrumental freedom which include a society's provision of healthcare and education, giving people the substantive freedom to live lives free of disease and with the educational skills that allow them to make use of other freedoms (ibid.). By 2006 in Baghdad most public services had ground to a halt along with the social opportunities contingent upon them. Every Iraqi I spoke to complained bitterly about the lack of electricity and clean water supplies. The collapse of the state compounded the damage to education and healthcare caused by the sanctions era. The security situation on the streets of Baghdad prevented basic services like refuse collection. Corpses were left to rot as people feared the snipers who often shot any person who came close to a dead body. In areas where the Mehdi Army militia was dominant, they also controlled fuel for generators, for cooking, and mobility. These pressures made daily life into a miserable grind, even for a wealthy family like Hadi's. All around them they could see Christians being harassed, and Muslims too. Shortly after the 2006 bombing of the Al Askari shrine in Samarra, a Sunni mosque was attacked in the neighbourhood, the guard and the Imam were killed. It was then renamed and turned into a Husseiniya, a Shia mosque and community centre. Hadi's family were acutely aware of identity killings going on in Baghdad - the mutual slaughter of Sunnis and Shias. The coercive circumstances intensified.

When I, as a Sabean, see that a Muslim is doing that to another Muslim, what's going to happen to me? I'm a candidate for it. And truly I wasn't just a candidate for it, I was actually threatened with it.

¹⁴ Hadi later explained that the state was selling them for the equivalent of a few dollars, the Mehdi Army would sell them for \$20-30 each.

The threats had accumulated. The threats had been to their inclusion in the political process as Mandaeans in the new Iraq, threats to their freedom to practise their faith and to sustain the integrity of their community, threats to their economic freedoms and to the mobility of all the individuals in their household. The threats encompassed their health as public services had collapsed and they included direct threats to their lives. Their living environment had become a coercive landscape permeated with a multitude of threats in a multitude of social spaces. The coercive landscape in which they now lived was intimately connected to the descent of Iraq after 2003 into a state of violence. In a state of violence, the laws, policies, customs, and practices which guarantee security for members of society are no longer there. Instead they are replaced with practices that do the opposite and threaten members of society in a generalised way. When the threats are no longer evadable, when remaining means enduring circumstances below a baseline that is no longer assured - such as adequate public services and physical security – people with the means to leave become very likely to do so. Hadi's family had the material resources to evade the threats in Baghdad to a considerable extent. They did not want to leave and were prepared to attempt all manner of threat-evasion and endure many threats to their physical security. But there is a threshold point for everyone and the pressures eventually intensified beyond an acceptable threshold.

That threshold was reached in April 2007 when their youngest son was kidnapped and held for 14 days. Luckily he was released alive after they paid a \$50,000 ransom. Hadi related the ordeal, the phone call that left him in shock, the police captain who told him frankly that they wouldn't be able to help him. Hadi knew they couldn't help, but wanted to register the abduction in case of the worst possible outcome. The captain gave him the name of a *shaqee*¹⁵, the leader of an organised crime network who specialised in finding kidnapped children. He found the *shaqee* had his own office and “about a hundred armed men at the door”. He agreed to help, took Hadi's number and a photograph of his son, but found a different kidnapped son who Hadi returned to his parents. It was only when Hadi spoke directly with the kidnappers that he was able to exchange the cash for his son's life.¹⁶

¹⁵ A *shaqee* is similar to the Lebanese *qabadhay* - a type of gangster. It literally means “tough man” from the word for toughness, *shaqaawa* [شقاوة - شقي]. Not all the *shaqees* are involved in benevolent activities.

¹⁶ As news travelled of what happened, Hadi was asked by other families to mediate in the release of twelve Mandaean hostages, all involving ransom payments of thousands of dollars.

I aged 20 years because of it, I swear, I jumped 20 years in my life. He would call me on the phone and say “Did you bring the money? Are you going to bring me the money or do I have to cut him into pieces and leave him at your front door in a sack?” He was young at the time, he was 12 years old.

Soon after his release, Hadi took his family to Syria for some much needed relief from the daily ordeals of life in Baghdad. They registered with the UNHCR who told them they would have to wait six months for a resettlement interview. Hadi and his family returned to Baghdad after about 50 days in Syria but the threats kept coming and felt more serious than before. The kidnapping of his son had heightened the terror of the threats. But Hadi didn't want to leave Iraq, he did not want to surrender his political freedoms (Sen, 1999) to fight for his community. He decided to go to Arbil, the capital city of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. There were Mandaean there, and a Mandaean Association which sponsored their entry. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) enforced entry controls. Anyone who was not Kurdish and who did not have an ID card issued in an area under its control, needed to have a sponsor to enter the region.

Hadi expected to be able to continue his political and economic work in the stability and relative economic prosperity of the Iraqi Kurdish region's capital. Instead, he spoke of chauvinism and discrimination in Arbil, and of political conditions similar to those he experienced in Saddam's time. First he tried to make use of the economic freedoms he assumed the relative security of the KRG area would allow him. He opened a gold and jewellery store as he had not had an income since 2003. Hadi discovered that for non-Kurdish traders there were no transparency guarantees (Sen, 1999: 39-40). This is the category of instrumental freedom which allows individuals to interact with each other “on some basic presumption of trust” to prevent “corruption” and “underhand dealings” (ibid.).¹⁷ Shaykh Rami discovered earlier that he had no such transparency with the police and now Hadi discovered the same with respect to Kurdish traders. Kurdish traders borrowed and never repaid, they gave false addresses. The lack of transparency guarantees blocked his economic opportunities, highlighting the interdependent nature of these freedoms. Hadi closed his store in Arbil and continued to live without an income. The education system did not accommodate non-Kurdish speakers either, meaning that his children's social opportunities were restricted.

¹⁷ See Chapter 1.

When the Assayj, Kurdish Political Security (KPS), paid him a visit, it was clear that his political freedoms would also be curtailed in the KRG.

They told me that they knew I was an activist who appeared on television. They told me I must not speak about minorities at all. I must not speak about the Christians, the Shabak, the Armenians, the Yazidis, even the Turkomans. They said if I wanted to speak I could speak about the Mandaean. They told me I had to sign an agreement [to that effect]. If I didn't do it then I had to return to Baghdad.

They told him that the other minorities were all Kurds and it was not his business to speak about them.¹⁸ After the deadly robbery of Shaykh Rami's family store took place, Hadi was contacted by Al Sharqiya satellite station for a telephone interview. He condemned police complicity, attacked the Iraqi government for failing to provide security, and denounced the Shia clergy in Najaf for their silence on the issue of the plight of Mandaeans.

The next day and after I started getting threatening phone calls from Baghdad. People were saying to me “How can you harass the police like that? How can you criticize the government? You're in Arbil, but don't think we can't get you there. We know where you are.”

A week later the Assayj came. They told me that I couldn't speak on television because I had signed an agreement. They said “you've embarrassed us in front of our allies”. They said that I now had to sign in with them on a weekly basis and that I must not leave the country without their permission. They were rough with me, the way they spoke. They were threatening me indirectly.

The Assayj threatened to send him to Baghdad if he did not comply, despite his protestations that it would probably lead to his death. Hadi was afraid that something would soon happen to him and left Iraq for Syria. He had an ID card from the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce which allowed him to enter Syria without a visa. His wife went with him, as did his youngest son, permitted to because he was under 18 at the time. His older son Fadhel had to wait for a

¹⁸ A worrying sign of the reproduction of oppressive behaviour. The Kurds in neighbouring Turkey were for long labelled “Mountain Turks” as a way of denying their Kurdish identity - the Kurdish language was banned from use in schools.

Syrian visa. The Assayj came looking for Hadi and found Fadhel instead. Angered that he had travelled without Assayj permission, they took Fadhel prisoner until Hadi returned to Arbil. Hadi had a friend who was an adviser to the KRG, he told him what happened and Hadi quickly returned to Iraq to free his son. Fadhel was released, but Hadi spent 59 days in a cramped prison until his friend in the KRG secured his release. Some days later, he secured an exit visa for Hadi. The Assayj allowed him to fly out of Iraq on February 14th 2010, and he has not since returned.

Hadi had clung to Iraq as tightly as he could, for as long as he could. The reasons he gave me were a mixture of moral obligations, emotional attachment to Iraq, and a resistance to abandon his material and social connections.

We are the original inhabitants of Iraq. ... The problem with us Sabeans in particular is that we are nationalists, we're clinging to the land of Iraq. We love Iraq. I've left so much wealth in Iraq. I left my interests, and I have connections whose value cannot be measured in the billions of dollars.

Mandaeans had an emotional attachment to Iraq and its rivers. It is where they had lived for centuries. Hadi's connections had helped him promote the interests of the sect and got him out of prison and other difficulties in the past. In the 1980s he used his connections to avoid combat duties on the front line against Iran and was assigned administrative duties instead. In the 1990s he was able to speak to the Iraqi president about Mandaean issues and was also able to arrange a private meeting with the governor of an Iraqi province where mid-level bureaucrats were obstructing the construction of a Mandaean temple. In 2010 his connection to a KRG advisor probably saved his life, preventing his imprisonment in Baghdad and perhaps his "disappearance".

Life in Baghdad, his wife Karima told me, "exhausted us to the point of despair, things just accumulated and accumulated." Their son's kidnap was the final instalment of a sequence of events which pushed them to leave Baghdad, but it wasn't yet enough for Hadi to decide to leave Iraq.

I insisted on staying because I had moral obligations to be there. I had work in the research

centres, and in civil society organisations like the Iraq Minorities Council, I had a lot of serious responsibilities. I went to Arbil in order not to leave Iraq. I thought maybe the situation would get better. I figured I could stay in Arbil and at least my name was still in Iraq. I did it in order to be free of the threats and preserve myself and my family. I wanted to breathe and for my family to breathe.

Hadi insisted that the decisions of others to leave did not affect him. Relatives abroad were astonished that he remained in Iraq, trying to persuade him over the phone to leave. Hadi believed his decision to remain for so long influenced other Mandaeans.

Of course there were many people who were waiting with me in Iraq. They used to say that as long as Hadi is here in Iraq, there is hope that Iraq will become better. ... As a known face, as a Mandaean activist, many of our friends, and many Mandaeans who saw me from a distance, knew that as long as I was in Iraq there was a hope in Iraq. That was a fact.

So there were those who left after you, because you left?

It was a justification for them, a reason to persuade themselves that it was over, that it wasn't worth remaining so let's leave. So and so had left, he had left too. If there was any good left in Iraq then they wouldn't have left. They would justify it like that. They needed a reason for themselves, to justify it to themselves. He would have been ready to leave psychologically.

The pressures had earlier accumulated in Baghdad to push Hadi's family beyond a threshold: no longer assured of important baselines, they left Baghdad for Arbil hoping for security and for Hadi to be able to generate income and continue his political activities. But again in Arbil they were pushed beyond a threshold by coercive circumstances and a very direct and personal threat to Hadi from Kurdish security services. Again the threats had accumulated. The threats in Arbil were to their freedom to generate income and to their children's education and social opportunities. Public services were not wretched and there was no generalised violence and insecurity in Arbil. But now Hadi faced a specific threat from the *Assayj*: imprisonment and possibly transfer to Baghdad where he could face indefinite detention or death. These threats aggregated with their experience of living in a coercive landscape in Baghdad to force them out of Iraq altogether. The Kurdish areas were no longer a refuge from

the state of violence in Baghdad. Having received threats from powerful figures in Arab and Kurdish areas of Iraq, it is difficult to see a possibility for Hadi and his family to safely return to Iraq. But this is what the perpetrators of the threats intended to achieve. Hadi described a situation in which the presence of a prominent community member adds to the morale of those who remain in a situation of crisis. When that figure is forced to leave, key resources are removed from the community and solidarity is weakened as part of a purposeful strategy to rid an area of a specific population (Marfleet, 2006: 245). But Hadi suggested that those people had already prepared themselves to leave, they just needed a final justification. Perhaps it was because by the time Hadi left Iraq in 2010, things were already so dire for others that leaving Iraq was an easy decision to make. If they had experienced similar threats to Hadi, similar constraints of their economic and political freedoms, a depletion of their social opportunities, and of their freedoms to practice their faith, then it is likely that Hadi's assessment of their motivations is correct. Hadi resisted longer than others before deciding to leave. It was, he told me, so that he wouldn't regret leaving. "But later I realised that I had left it very late. I should have left earlier, regrettably."

Abu Waleed decides to leave

We heard from Hadi and Shaykh Rami about how living in a state of violence affected the Mandaeans. This situation impacted strongly on the Palestinians too. Earlier, Abu Waleed spoke of the increasing hostility against the Palestinians of Iraq. They were stripped of their permanent residency by the state. Their tenancy situations became precarious as private landlords began forcibly evicting them in order to increase their rental income, something the Palestinians were shielded from by the former regime. Abu Waleed moved apartment because his rent trebled and he sensed a veiled threat in a conversation with the landlord. The American Army had raided the Palestinian Embassy. Later, a hostile media campaign began against the Palestinians and a group of them were falsely accused of a terrorist attack in a Baghdad market. Palestinians were being killed, as Abu Waleed recalls, on a weekly basis. Despite these changes, these threats and pressures, Abu Waleed had not wanted to leave Iraq. It was a prime topic of concern in the community.

Did you used to meet together and discuss the situation, whether to stay or not?

Of course of course, almost every day. In people's homes, in cafés, in the street, people would discuss it almost every day. During any meeting in any place, the conversations Palestinians were having in Baghdad from 2003 to 2006 included “are you going to leave? When are you going to leave?” That was the topic.

Abu Waleed persistently argued that they should remain in Iraq, that was until February 2006, when the Al Askari shrine in Samarra was bombed and identity killings - people being murdered based on their confessional affiliation – intensified in the city.

The dividing line for me was not the occupation of Iraq, it was the event of Samarra. We lived four difficult days in the house. There was a curfew and there was no food outside. There was a curfew outside. All there was between you and the world was the television, when there was electricity. There were identity killings close by. The Baladiyat residential compound [where many Palestinians lived] was targeted. Five Palestinians were killed in a day or two days. Two brothers were amongst them. They killed them and they mutilated their bodies. They wouldn't give the bodies to their families. There was a raid on the Baladiyat compound. There were clashes between militia men and Palestinians in the compound.

Abu Waleed described how hours after the Samarra bombing sectarian militias roamed the streets of Baghdad and began identity killings, attacking and burning mosques in the process. Reprisals accelerated into a bloody and barbarous cycle. Harling (2011) identifies the Mehdi Army as the culprits and comments that “as the horror escalated, [it] destroyed any sense of shared humanity” (Harling, 2011:48). Abu Waleed was acutely aware of this as he monitored his surroundings. Already under attack for being Palestinian, they found themselves deeper in danger as now they were targets for another reason: most of them were Sunni Muslims. Abu Waleed reeled off the names and causes of death of Palestinians in Iraq - he was documenting them for a community website.¹⁹ But as a group they had a heightened awareness of the deaths in their community. Not only was it relatively small but three quarters of them hailed from the same three villages in Palestine. There was intermarriage between the families so news of

¹⁹ The site www.paliraq.com contains details about the situation of Palestinians in Iraq, and those who have been able to resettle in third countries, like Sweden.

deaths and kidnappings would travel quickly. A close friend of Abu Waleed's was strangled, and he would hear news of what felt like a deliberate targeting of Palestinian men. One such story was of three Palestinian craftsmen who were ambushed at a petrol station. Armed men sprayed their car with bullets and fled, leading Abu Waleed to the conclusion that it was a deliberate attack.

In the widespread violence, it was difficult to assess the motives behind all of the killings that took place. Was it a violent robbery? Was it an exemplary attack designed to frighten a group? Was it a sectarian killing? Certainly these motives were not mutually exclusive. These threats were experienced by all Baghdadis during 2006 and 2007, which Abu Waleed described as the “worst two years in Iraq's history”.

It was in that environment that people were becoming increasingly convinced that they were under threat and that we shouldn't remain in Iraq. Most people were trying to get along with their lives, to evade the effects of the situation.

But how can a person evade these things?

He wouldn't move so much. He would speak Iraqi Arabic well. He wouldn't leave the house a lot. Most of the Palestinian victims were killed on their way to work, or on their way home from work, or at checkpoints. Everyone one of them has a story. They were targeted. The developments in Iraq passed through a very dangerous course. For two years and ten months I had accepted the idea that the occupation had happened and that what was happening to Iraqis was also going to happen to Palestinians living in Iraq, and that I would live through this period, cautiously. It wouldn't last for ever. I would live like the Iraqis. But events didn't take that course. ... We didn't have much electricity and there was no movement or transport. I realised during that period - with the worry that was burdening us, our family, and most Palestinian families – with the events that were happening and spreading that I would be targeted, or someone in my family would be targeted, or maybe the whole family might be targeted. I had to think seriously about leaving Iraq. The country wasn't safe for us, the whole country wasn't safe generally but specifically for us as Palestinians, we were very very much in danger. In the end I *had* to leave.

Abu Waleed no longer felt safe being a Palestinian or a Sunni Muslim in Baghdad. His mobility was severely restricted – there was a coercive proposal inherent in every journey within the city: remain confined to the house perhaps without necessary basic supplies, and certainly without electricity, or make the journey and risk death. He pretended to be a Christian from northern Iraq but Christians were not entirely safe as a group either. During the worst of the violence no groups were truly safe in the city. Sunnis and Shias could move to neighbourhoods where notionally they were protected by armed groups with the same confessional affiliation and some Christians were able to move to Christian settlements in the north of Iraq (though that was not without problems). Palestinians had no such option, in a similar way to the Mandaean. They did not have villages in the north and there was no militia controlled area that was safe for them.

To Abu Waleed, circumstances presented a clear coercive proposal. Stay in Iraq and face what he believed would result in certain death, for himself or a family member. Or leave and face the uncertainty of life in Syria. The baseline was about preserving the lives of his family. Iraq was his country of birth and where he was raised. It was, he told me, his home despite a strong attachment to Palestine. Leaving was, emotionally, an extremely difficult decision. Leaving and remaining were both unpalatable proposals but remaining carried a heavier price. He waited for his eldest daughter to graduate and took his family to Damascus, from where he assigned a Palestinian lawyer in Baghdad to collect his daughter's graduation certificate. The lawyer was later killed on his way home from his office: the \$2000 cash that was in his car was stolen, making it unclear if it was a robbery or a targeted murder or both, and further vindicating Abu Waleed's decision to leave. The events of 2006 and the ensuing descent into a violent abyss, a transformation of the country into a state of violence, changed Abu Waleed's perception of his environment. He could sense an imminent threat, a general danger imposed on every resident of the city. He was now living in a coercive landscape and was doubly a target for being Palestinian and for being Sunni. The norms of protection had been weakened after 2003 but after 2006 they were completely destroyed in the perception of Abu Waleed.

Conclusion

Displacement is a process which can be better explained with a broader understanding of threat and by considering how threat perception varies between and within reference groups.

In this chapter the cases of Mandaean Iraqis and the Palestinians of Iraq. I again mobilised the notions of coercive proposals and hard choices (Wertheimer, 1987) to shed light on the forced nature of migration decisions and the specific types of coercion experienced by these minority communities. I have shown the importance of analysing the circumstances which coerce agents into decisions. Coercive proposals and hard choices are not only imposed by one individual upon another, but also by changed environments which threaten valued baselines. These baselines not only relate to immediate survival, but also to different types of freedoms. I referred to the religious freedoms which were restricted for Mandaeans. I also discussed the instrumental freedoms, outlined in Chapter 1,²⁰ which allow a person to live in a valued way and these included economic and political freedoms as well as transparency guarantees (Sen, 1999: 39-40). The narratives in this chapter showed how these dynamics affected the lives of minority groups in Iraq. While some of their experiences overlapped with those of the wider Iraqi society, with the general sense of insecurity associated with living in a state of violence (Harling, 2011), their baselines were threatened in ways specific to these groups.

I have also shown how the dynamics of cumulative causation played a coercive role in migration decisions – both in decisions to leave and decisions to stay. As noted already, the departure of members of a community or group affects the context within which those who remain make decisions (Douglas Massey, 1990). In Chapters 4 and 5, and in this chapter, it was evident that the dynamics of cumulative causation coerced Iraqis into leaving. Such pressures were exerted on members of Iraq's minorities in this chapter. In Chapter 5 I also noted that feedback mechanisms immobilised those without the resources to cushion against the financial risks which leaving could entail. In this chapter the phenomenon was referred to again in relation to Mandaean families who did not have the economic buffer necessary to risk a protracted period of living in Syria without an income. Feedback from cumulative causation can force both movement and immobility.

The resources available to an agent directly affected migration decisions and displacement experiences. In Chapter 5 I discussed the effects of a lack of resources on decisions to leave and to stay. In this chapter the stories of Hadi and Shaykh Rami contrasted with previous stories of Farah and Yousif. Hadi in particular had substantial economic assets and social connections to draw upon in his efforts to evade threats and to remain in Iraq for as long as he

²⁰ See Chapter 1, pp. 24-26.

safely could. He was also able to hire a driver for his wife and daughter to temporarily mitigate against constraints to mobility which they experienced as Mandaean women. This example also shows how gender, confessional identity and economic assets intersect in ways which have implications for displacement. In Chapter 5 Um Ahmed was able to drive unaccompanied in different parts of Baghdad, as a Shia Arab woman who could also pass as a Sunni Arab. She drove her children to and from school and her mobility was not constrained in the same way as that of the women in Hadi's family.

When all of these threats and constraints combine - appearing in different spaces and threatening multiple baselines - agents are confronted with a coercive landscape. The essence of the coercive landscape remained similar for most Iraqis – a social and physical environment laden with threats to baselines, to instrumental freedoms, to physical safety and one in which life is heavily constrained. However, the experience of the coercive landscape differed for minority groups, in the sense that their understanding of threat and experience of it was specific, as I have outlined in the previous pages. Again, the presence of coercive proposals in daily life and the accumulation of threats led the participants in this chapter into hard choice situations. Their options were limited to a set of unpalatable proposals. Migration, a coerced decision to leave their homes and eventually to leave Iraq, was the least unpalatable of these proposals.

The stories of Hadi, Shaykh Rami and Abu Waleed indicate the cumulative nature of the displacement process and the ways in which threats and constraints accumulate to force a migration decision. Their stories illustrate how threats and constraints can be understood collectively by minority groups and how changes to the environment can result in changes to threat perception. In the climate of insecurity that plagued Iraq from 2003, people like Abu Waleed still believed they could remain in the country through threat evasion strategies and perseverance. After 2006 when the situation became one of a state of violence, the sense of threat changed. It was heightened and intensified in a way that permeated multiple spaces in daily life: many Iraqis were living in a coercive landscape. Threats became a feature of daily life, coercive proposals had to be taken into account with formerly routine tasks and journeys. In the concluding discussion I propose that the concept of a coercive landscape can be mobilised in forced migration studies to understand the displacement experience more holistically.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Hard choices in coercive landscapes

As I suggested in Chapter 1, it is the element of duress in the decision making process which must be considered if we are to better understand forced migration. Forced migrations are indeed “hard choices” to borrow Wertheimer's words (1987), or “excruciating choices” to use Richmond's (1994: 53). Richmond is a rare example of a scholar addressing what it means to be forced to make a decision to leave. Penz (2002: 10-11) also made advances with the concept of migration intended by agents to escape “harms” to livelihoods. Discussions about the meaning of force in these journeys are few in the field of refugee studies, yet the concept is widely used and taken for granted. The contributions of Penz and Richmond to the debate are valuable. However Richmond doubted the validity of the distinction between forced and free choices in migration because, he noted, all human actions are constrained (ibid.). What was important was his recognition of the extreme constraint and stress in forced migration decisions (Richmond, 1994:55). It is necessary to recognise that being confined to those choices is against the will of the agent (Wertheimer, 1987:301-302) and that is the route to understanding the forced nature of the refugee experience. I have mobilised the notion of a hard choice situation throughout the thesis to highlight the forced nature of Iraqis' decisions to leave their homes. To recap: a “hard choice” is an extreme form of coercive proposal. A coercive proposal confines an agent to options that will leave him/her worse off in relation to an accepted baseline – but not necessarily in a parlous state (Wertheimer, 1997: 204). It could mean a reduced income or a longer journey to work. A “hard choice” situation is similar to a coercive proposal but intensely constrained. The options available are extremely unpalatable - they will leave the agent in dire straits whichever one of the proposals he or she chooses (Wertheimer, 1987: 233). The consequences of the hard choice may be of especial importance and their scope is characteristically limited by their unattractiveness (ibid.). They can leave an agent in acute economic insecurity or threaten physical safety. To be worse off is to recognise that there is a baseline below which an agent does not wish to fall and that the baseline is subjectively understood (Wertheimer, 1987).

The framework used by Wertheimer relates to interpersonal coercive proposals - when a proposal and a threat combine to form a coercive proposal. This happens when person A threatens to leave person B worse off in relation to a baseline if B does not accept the

proposal, and only less worse off if the proposal is accepted I also looked at “thoffers” – an offer that leaves a person better off if she accepts it or worse off if she does not. But none of the cases I studied contained real “thoffers” - only coercive proposals. Earlier, I suggested expanding this to include social circumstances that present an agent with a coercive proposal to which the agent responds. I have drawn attention to the ways in which Iraqis in this study have understood these proposals and responded to them with strategies of evasion. When these coercive proposals permeate a multiplicity of spaces in daily life, when threat is perceived in multiple spaces, the agent's environment becomes a coercive landscape. Iraqis assessed their options and attempted to navigate safely through the coercive landscape in response to the threats pervading it. Some of them believed that their survival was dependent on escaping the coercive landscape altogether and those with the means to leave eventually did. Forced migration choices are threat-induced and part of evasive strategies undertaken by agents who are highly attuned to the dangers around them. The understanding of threat is subjective in various ways: it is understood differently by individuals and reference groups and their understanding in turn changes as their surroundings evolve in ways that can heighten their sense of threat. These choices are made after a process of displacement which is often protracted and holistic in nature. For many Iraqis migration was a desperate option after a sequence of constraining and often violent episodes in a climate of generalised threat and insecurity.

Generalised threat was caused by Iraq's transformation into a “state of violence” which operates in distinction to a “state of law” (Harling, 2011). In a state of violence norms and practices that members of society rely upon in a state of law - for a degree of protection and security - do not function. In Iraq, they were replaced with violent activities as a range of different armed actors aspiring to control the nascent state vied for control of different social spaces in increasingly brutal ways. In a state of violence, of generalised insecurity, the spaces in people's lives become laced with threats and a person, family or reference group is likely to perceive threats in a myriad of spaces in their social world. Their environment becomes a coercive landscape. In this landscape threats can accumulate to the point at which individuals and reference groups are confronted with adjustments to their social circumstances that constitute a threat to survival. They are forced to take radical decisions – hard choices characterised by their lack of scope - against their will in order to navigate through or escape from the coercive landscape altogether. Threat perception is heightened with the aggregation of pressures and constraints that come with a collapse of security and public protection. People responded to these threats in different ways as the sense of danger gathered impetus.

Actions which may have seemed relatively unthreatening – such as members of a political movement asking about a person's whereabouts or graffiti on the front gate – took on a different meaning as the sense of threat pervaded broader circumstances. This was especially true when the agent belonged to a reference group that was being targeted or purged.

Deliberations and consultations

In Chapter 1 I considered Aristotle's reflections about making moral choices – those relating to practical matters which can be achieved through an agent's own instrumentality.¹ Aristotle observed that agents examine the means available to them, and which of those means are most viable and creditable. They deliberate with co-adjustors in counsel to consider important choices (Aristotle, NE iii 3: 61-63). I also considered the role of household members in making decisions to leave. In the subsequent data chapters, I have assessed how Iraqis examined their options and which members of the household or family unit had the most control over the decision. I looked at whether or not co-adjustors were sought in counsel and the extent to which they influenced decisions to leave. In cases examined in earlier chapters, the decision to leave was taken by the man heading the household. The women did figure in the calculations, the deliberations and the preparations. But even where the adult woman had a strong role in the family and initiated the move, the man still held veto power. The household featured strongly in decisions to leave. Men made decisions with the household and the security of its members in mind. There was little evidence of significant influence from non-kinship networks. As stated already, the household does not refer solely to the people living in a physical structure but to a dynamic and fluid unit that transcends geographical place; it includes individuals who live in a variety of locations (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011: 28). The information and resources of close relatives living abroad were considered during the decision making process and also after it to implement the decision. The household itself evolves in ways that can influence migration decisions. Majeed's household in Iraq grew larger in a way that meant he could not afford to return from Syria, also showing how a lack of material resources can limit mobility. Household members living abroad played key roles in other decisions, as providers of information and financial assistance.

The efforts of non-family, non-household networks were less influential. Christian and

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See Chapter 1, pp.32-33.

Mandaean priests could only play advisory roles and were unable to persuade members of their faith groups to remain in Iraq. The Mandaean clergy stopped trying after the dangers of being a Mandaean in Iraq became so grave. The Palestinians of Iraq had daily discussions about deciding to leave - in cafés, in the street and in each other's homes. But Abu Waleed's decision to leave was, he told me, entirely his own and with the safety of his family members in mind. Once a decision to leave had been made, it remained within the confines of the nuclear family. Safety fears factored in this: a family on the move was more vulnerable to attack by armed groups.

State transformation and coercive circumstances

State transformation resulted in coercive changes that threatened to take particular reference groups below an acceptable baseline. Those perceived to belong to the old Iraqi order as its employees, and others perceived to have been its beneficiaries such as the Palestinians of Iraq, were targeted systematically by the new order. So too were those who represented the old order symbolically in as much as they were evidence of a multi-confessional Iraq. That was how the Iraqi Mandaeans I interviewed made sense of their situation. They, along with former military officers and high level administrators, and the Palestinian refugees resident in Iraq, seem to have been perceived as the embodiment of the former Ba'athi regime. The state, as noted by Gardner (2012: 28), is not only conceived of as laws, bureaucracies, and apparatuses. It is also understood as “a configuration of powers *inseparable*² from the embodiment in individual citizens.” They were directly targeted after the former state collapsed and a new order began to emerge from it. The Palestinians of Iraq were victims of statecraft – the craft of state building - actions intended to strengthen the state (Soguk, 1999). The nascent Iraqi state was weak and the Palestinians vulnerable: by targeting them it could masquerade its weakness as strength. The policies of the Iraqi state were understood by the Palestinians as a collective threat. Under foreign occupation and in a climate of generalised violence, attacks on Mandaeans and Palestinians took on a greater meaning: both believed they were being targeted as part of concerted efforts to remove them forcibly from Iraq. Their sense of threat was heightened as the number of attacks on their members increased and communal violence escalated after 2006. The narratives of the Mandaeans and Palestinians, and also Christian and Sunni Iraqis, suggest that while Iraq's minorities shared many of the same experiences of threats with their compatriots, they also experienced threat in ways specific to belonging to a minority. Minority experiences of displacement related to state-transformation deserves further attention from scholars. It would be useful to consider the

² Emphasis in original.

experiences of Iraq's minorities comparatively in historical and geographic terms, with those of other minority groups.

Transformations of state manifested themselves in different ways and in different spaces in the lives of the Iraqis in this study. We saw in earlier chapters how spaces in people's lives were altered in coercive ways. Threats appeared in the school and neighbourhood causing them to take evasive actions until they were safe or until the threats could no longer be evaded and migration became necessary to avoid danger. We also saw evidence of the different forms that displacement can take, the restrictions upon people's instrumental freedoms (Sen, 1999) that it can impose. Political, religious and economic freedoms, as well as social opportunities and transparency guarantees, are the main groupings I outlined in Chapter 1 based on Sen's (1999) development framework.³ Being able to exercise these freedoms in spaces that do not contain threats to physical safety were baselines that some of my participants valued enough to make them leave in search of being assured of them elsewhere. Threat must also be considered as circumstantial changes which put the exercise of these freedoms at risk. The collapse of the state under occupation created a situation in which armed groups flourished and their activities produced threatening alterations to important spaces in daily life which prevented agents from utilising valued instrumental freedoms. In addition to the American Army there were mercenaries and armed Resistance fighters. The Mehdi Army, the Badr Brigade, and groups related to Al Qaeda in Iraq also benefited from the absence of centralised state authority. This was in addition to the criminal gangs that terrorized the population and were often indistinguishable – if not a part of – the militia groups. Their actions directly and indirectly constrained the freedoms of many Iraqis in this study – threatening their freedoms in addition to their physical safety.

The coercive transformations of space I presented in Chapter 5 were not in themselves decisive events but part of a process of displacement and an accumulation of perceived threats. Baan's school became a site of armed conflict but it was not enough in itself to make her parents decide to leave Iraq. Jasim's parents took him to Syria after an explosion in the school he was transferred to in order to evade armed conflict near his first school. In both cases they were threats to physical safety, but in Jasim's case they had appeared after a sequence of other violent episodes and pressures on his family overall. Baan's family eventually left their neighbourhood but again after a sequence of violent episodes and

³ See pp. 24-26 and Sen (1999).

transformations which heightened her mother's perception of threat. Their experiences show the cumulative nature of displacement, a process that can lead to a forced migration. Displacement and forced migration are connected but should not be conflated (Lubkemann, 2008) as many people experience the constraints and pressures of the displacement process but do not relocate from their normal place of residence. They are displaced in place (ibid.) and those who wish to move but cannot do so are “involuntarily immobilised” (ibid.). This is in the sense that they cannot relocate to another country – or perhaps even to another residence in the same country. However, as seen in the lives of my participants, there is typically a lot of mobility involved in their threat evasion strategies regardless of whether relocation is possible or not.

Threats on the move and the gendered nature of displacement

In a state of violence, mobility is heavily affected - typically constrained. A key feature of the coercive landscape in Iraq was the lethal threat understood to be implicit in every journey made – especially in Baghdad - during 2006-2007. The routes to school and work, and to home, became places of danger. This was because of the presence and actions of US forces, Iraqi government forces, and other groups fighting them and each other. These armed groups often directly attacked civilians and Iraqis found themselves in great peril as they made journeys to work, school, and to buy food. A network of concrete blast barriers and dividing walls obstructed and complicated movement in the city. Checkpoints, where people were shot if they were carrying the wrong type of ID card, pervaded the city. Many Iraqis tried to limit their journeys to those of necessity and to avoid routes disrupted by checkpoints. Constraints on one type of freedom can adversely affect a person's ability to exercise others. A threat to the freedom of mobility is a threat to the freedom to do a range of things. The story of Raz's father illustrated this in Chapter 5. When Mehdi Army gunmen came to kill him in his workplace they missed him but in doing so changed his perception of threat. Leaving his neighbourhood – impervious to the Mehdi Army as it was protected by the Resistance – now contained a lethal threat. Remaining in Iraq meant living without an income and being confined to the few streets protected by the Resistance.

The gendered nature of displacement was salient in the case of mobility. Displacement as the appearance of threats in spaces of transit affected men and women differently. The threat of violence combined with gender relations to increase restrictions on women's mobility, and also to put men in greater physical danger. In this coercive landscape women were often not allowed to travel alone, especially the younger ones who were potential targets for rapists and

kidnappers (though the eldest son of a family was considered to fetch the highest ransom). Men were at risk of sexual assault too. Whilst working as a translator, I met an Iraqi man who was subjected to multiple sexual assaults at a police station in Baghdad. He explained that he was detained on false grounds so that police could extort money from his relatives in exchange for his release.

Unlike men, women were also not typically *expected* to go out and generate income. Many Iraqi women have had to do so as a result of necessity, particularly widows. The shopkeeper whose murder was witnessed by Anwar was a woman, but I was unable to feature this demographic in my study. Anwar's parents were too old to work and so he had to. He told me that it would have been considered shameful for the family to allow his sisters to work because this would mean that the men were incapable of providing for them. Jobs were scarce so many men worked as makeshift taxi drivers in their private cars despite the risks. This had become an extremely hazardous way to make a living in Baghdad. Hadi told me of a neighbour who was killed for straying into the wrong neighbourhood whilst working as a taxi driver. A man from outside a neighbourhood that was in the midst of intense armed conflict could be seen as a threat – sometimes a challenge. In some situations it was safer for a woman to be seen driving than a man. This is not to say that women were safe driving alone: Hadi's wife and daughter were afraid to because Mandaean women travelling alone were at risk of assault by extremists. He had the financial resources to pay a Muslim neighbour to drive his daughter to university and elsewhere. But that ceased after Mehdi Army militia men intimidated the driver. Hadi's wife stopped driving altogether. To leave the house she was advised to wear a headscarf by a worried Muslim neighbour. The Mehdi Army had been threatening Christians where they lived and she wanted her to dress like a Muslim to avoid this risk. When militias roamed the streets, harassment by armed groups for not wearing a headscarf was a problem for Iraqi women generally. Maher's wife Rania spoke of Mehdi Army members at the university of Baghdad pressuring women to cover their hair. What was also interesting was the intersection of gender, communal identity and material resources and their implications for displacement. Hadi's wife was able to mitigate these constraints – which related to her being a Mandaean woman - temporarily because of the material resources available to her family. Um Ahmed did not have the same resources at her disposal but because of her identity as a Muslim woman who could pass as either a Sunni or a Shia, she was able to drive alone in areas she calculated were safe.

While men were in greater physical danger during mobility, the women in this study appear to

have experienced the greater restriction overall on their mobility. Farah believed that adults were using the security situation as an excuse to exert more control over young women. Baan felt frustrated that she was not allowed to leave the house unsupervised yet the same rules did not apply to her older brother. She grew up in Baghdad but knew the streets of Damascus much better, even though she had only lived there for one year. This was because in Damascus she was allowed to travel unsupervised as it was safe to do so at the time. The gendered nature of displacement – and the interaction of gender with other identities and material resources - is worth investigating further.

Cumulative Causation

Cumulative causation was clearly present in the displacement process. To recap on Chapter 1, migration is cumulatively effected “in the sense that each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, typically in ways that make additional migration more likely” (Massey et al., 1998: 45-46). Movement of kinship networks across borders, such as to Syria and Jordan, can also facilitate journeys of those who remain. They act as points of information and support for new arrivals, provide the information needed in pre-migratory planning, and also help to find new arrivals somewhere to live in their destination. But the flight of others, the movement of kin and other community networks, does not only work as a facilitator. It can work coercively, resulting in leaving agents below the baseline of family and community integrity. As I observed in previous chapters, separation from kinship and other networks is a type of displacement. It is a development which makes additional journeys to reunite with family and community networks more likely. This is a coercive pressure exerted on those who remained and who had not decided to leave but were soon compelled into doing so. There is a coercive proposal at work. Those who remain after other relatives have departed do so knowing that they must live without the support that kinship networks provide. Yousif's situation was a salient example in Chapter 5. Aside from one unmarried uncle, he had no extended family left in Iraq. His relatives had all left for Australia and elsewhere. As well as the loss of proximate support networks there was the added pressure of his relatives attempting to persuade Yousif and his family to join them. But the economic risk was too great for his father to take: he feared being in a situation of financial dependency on his relatives which he considered worse than remaining in Baghdad. Yousif's case also illustrates the contrasting feedback dynamic of cumulative causation – one which compels agents *not* to migrate. As a result of information feeding back about the possibilities of impoverishment in Syria and Jordan, where Iraqis took

refuge but were not formally allowed to work, they developed a heightened association of migration with a risk to economic security.

Displacement also took the form of the depletion of the cultural community – as in the cases of the Mandaeans and Christians. Yousif observed dwindling numbers of the congregation at his church. As well as affecting his social life this also meant that maintaining the community became more difficult. He is a Chaldean Christian and expressed his preference to marry and procreate with a co-religionist. The Mandaeans too have dwindled in number and any Mandaean who marries outside the religious group is spurned by it. The departure of key figures in a community affects its integrity. As I noted in Chapter 6 with the Mandaeans, it can also affect its functioning and this is a deliberate strategy of armed groups aiming to forcibly depopulate certain areas (Marfleet, 2006). It was not only priests who were key figures but also visible activists such as Hadi. Other Mandaeans expressed their relief at knowing he had remained in Iraq - that they felt hope for the community as long as key figures remained. Key figures helped to maintain the morale of those who remained. Conversely, their departure curtailed it. By considering the reality of an entire community's departure we can further see how minorities were affected more intensely by displacement, something also worth considering in future comparative studies.

Cumulative causation also worked coercively outside the kinship context. Within the neighbourhood there was the unsettling effect of finding that the street was emptied of its residents in the pre-invasion exodus from Baghdad. Anwar's mother and sister had initially decided to remain in Baghdad but changed their minds because they were unsettled by the flight of their neighbours. Similarly, in 2006, Um Ahmed watched as Shia families were threatened and left their homes on her street within a space of a few months. They were the last Shia family remaining on the street and this change created a sharp sense of insecurity, showing how the flight of others coerces those who remain. Beyond the neighbourhood, cumulative causation coerces people to leave when the departure of members of a reference group diminishes the assets and integrity of group members who do not leave. The coercive proposal is thus: stay behind and be part of a vanishing community under threat in Iraq, such as the Mandaeans, or leave and attempt to rejoin the group in a less threatening setting abroad, but one with a different set of insecurities to confront. As I noted earlier, the Mandaeans who did not leave Iraq were less able to practise their rituals. They were also less able to procreate as they were not permitted to marry outside their religious community.

Scholars of migration have already demonstrated the benefits of exploring the dynamics of cumulative causation. I have argued that the theory is worth investigating in a forced migration context. I suggest that population movements in a displacement crisis can be similar to those identified by Massey and others (1990, 1993, 2005) in migrations between Mexico and the United States. There is also evidence that the dynamics of cumulative causation not only facilitate migration but can also force it. In a situation of economic crisis and generalised violence, the departure of proximate support networks has a powerful effect on those who remain – they are faced with the possibility of enduring arduous circumstances alone. It is also clear that negative feedback from cumulative causation can curb mobility. In light of my findings in this study, I believe it would be productive for scholars to consider two issues in future research. One is that the dynamics of cumulative causation in other contexts of displacement should be assessed. The other is to reconsider the “economic” migration contexts, in which cumulative causation has already been identified, in light of its coercive dynamics. By examining how “economic” migrants experienced the coercive pressures of cumulative causation, it is also worth asking if their migrations should be considered *forced* in nature.

The displacement process and coercive landscapes

I have attempted to show that a forced migration is a decision to move taken under duress, in accordance with the decision maker's evolving perception of threat and after a process of displacement. Cumulative causation plays a role in this process, as discussed above. The process can also include constraints related to transformations of state and to the coercive alterations of spaces in people's daily lives. Iraqis relayed the different ways in which their displacement was cumulative. They adapted their daily routines to the evolving circumstances: some changed their routes to work and to school, some restricted their journeys to ones of absolute necessity and some did not leave their homes at all for extended periods in order to evade threats. Parents transferred their children to schools in areas where armed conflict was less intense. Other Iraqis relocated their businesses to more secure areas. Some made temporary migrations within the country, away from their areas of origin whilst others made temporary journeys abroad as part of threat evasion strategies. They were measures designed to elude dangers - the decision to leave Iraq altogether was typically a last resort. They had often exhausted all the options available to them to evade threats without leaving Iraq and made a hard choice to leave their country under duress.

The experiences of refugees - Iraqis who have left the state – have been the focus of this study. Yousif and the nuclear family members of Baan and also Farah are exceptions. They decided to remain in Iraq rather than risk the economic insecurity of long-term migration and endure the increasing constraints on their daily lives as a result of displacement. The experiences of Iraqis who are *displaced in place* have not been addressed centrally here but this is an important area for further research. How does the displacement process affect others who remain in Iraq? The effects of this process on those who did not leave Iraq - or their areas of origin - deserve scholarly attention.

I have found it useful to develop the idea of a coercive landscape in which an aggregation of threats has the effect of severely constraining those who live within it. Their choices are severely diminished as threats permeate and constrain a multiplicity of spaces in their daily lives. It is within the coercive landscape that processes of displacement and coercive pressures can combine to induce mass displacement. The notion of the coercive landscape refers both to a social world in which threats diminish the choices available to agents and to the physical environment they traverse. Agents are subjected to a number of coercive pressures which relate to dynamics of cumulative causation, statecraft and economic collapse - a profusion of threats and constraints. It is also clear that in the shaping of the coercive landscape, gender relations are profoundly important. Certain spaces can be transformed in ways which make women the direct focus of threat initiatives or focal points for the generalisation of fear. Men may also face greater threats than women in some situations and this can be directly related to gender roles: in the Chaldean and Mandaean communities, men were the priests and therefore more likely to be targeted. These are important issues which warrant further research.

The idea of a coercive landscape emerges from a situation which is the outcome of specific developments – local, regional and global – relating to Iraq during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. My work is also based on snapshots in time. As I wrote in Chapter 2, my field-work was contingent on a moment in history and the stories I collected and co-constructed were told in a complex political context – one which has changed drastically since. I cannot claim that these are representative of Iraqis involved in the major displacements which occurred after 2003. But the testimonies presented here have been useful sources from which to make general inferences - these can be tested and developed by further research. It would now be helpful for scholars of forced migration if comparative work –

geographically and historically – could be undertaken so that we can examine whether the notion of a coercive landscape is useful in other situations of mass displacement.

Thinking of mass displacement in terms of decisions made in a coercive landscape requires a holistic approach to migrants' experiences - research into various aspects of the social world in order to construct an understanding of wider pressures that contribute to the decision to leave. The connection to processes of state formation, state collapse and to “statecraft”, should be examined closely to identify causative elements. Narratives of the displaced should be collected systematically to make historical comparisons. Kushner (2006: 15) has remarked that refugees are “the forgotten of history, the abused of politics” and that they have been deliberately ignored in the historical record (Kushner, 2006: 17-18). Iraqis displaced after 2003 point to the failures of the Anglo-American military intervention and to the disingenuous claims made by its architects about their concerns for the welfare of the country and its people. They provide a salutary testimony for those who supported the occupation and hold the view that humanitarian imperialism is possible. They are even more awkward for the post-2003 political order in Iraq – many of Iraq's political elite are directly connected to militias which displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The experience of refugees and the representations of them have had little in common (Kushner, 2006: 1). Here narrative research methods can be particularly useful to counter this. They offer researchers a method of eliciting detailed testimonies and encourage participants to reflect on and make sense of extraordinary events. It is in part through such a holistic and refugee-centred approach that we can begin, to borrow once more from Kushner (2006: 47), the task of “putting refugees back into history.”

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Biographical information about the participants in this study

Abu Bakr

A retired officer in the Iraqi Republican Guard which was the professional and not conscript based army. He was an electronic systems engineer and not an armed officer but was still excluded from the new armed forces in Iraq after 2003 as he was considered to belong to the former regime. He was in his mid 40s. Abu Bakr had a love for cars and enjoyed watching the TV show *Top Gear* with Arabic subtitles. He is Adnaan's brother and has family origins in Tikrit but lived in Baghdad until his departure for Syria. I met him and Adnaan when I was working as a translator for ILAS (Iraqi Legal Aid Society).¹ I interviewed Abu Bakr in a restaurant close to my home in Damascus.

Abu S

He had attained a senior position in the administration of public health and other medical matters in a province in southern Iraq. I met him in a clinic in the Damascus suburb of Sayidda Zaineb. I had interviewed an Iraqi dentist² who worked there – my Iraqi research assistant introduced me to him - and he introduced me to Abu S who was employed as a pharmacist in the same clinic. Abu S was living in Damascus, separated from all of his family members who were still living in Iraq. I interviewed him in the pharmacy while he worked. He was around 50 years old.

Abu Waleed

Abu Waleed was born in Baghdad but his family originated in Palestine. They were refugees living in Baghdad. I met him through my colleague Tahir Zaman and interviewed him in his home in the Yarmouk Camp suburb of Damascus which – as its name suggests – had evolved from a refugee camp for Palestinians. Abu Waleed was in his early 50s and spent a lot of time contributing to the community website of the Palestinians of Iraq www.paliraq.com.

Adnaan

The brother of Abu Bakr, in his forties, and also a former officer in the Iraqi Republican Guard. Unlike his brother he was an armed officer – a parachute instructor in the Special Forces of the Republican Guard. His family origins were in Tikrit but he had grown up in Baghdad. He was a pious Muslim. In his neighbourhood of Ghazaliya he had established a Sons of Iraq group to combat Al Qaida and militia activity there. The project was successful whilst overseen by American forces but he was forced out after Iraqi government forces took over – eventually having to leave the Iraq altogether. I interviewed him in a restaurant in Damascus.

Anwar

A man in his 30s who ran a grocery stall in Baghdad. He left for Syria because of militia activity where he lived and ran his stall. In Syria he worked as an interpreter for the Iraqi Legal Assistance Project and set-up a project which helped Iraqi and American school children interact on the internet. He developed an interest in film and photography and made a

¹

See Chapter 2.

² The dentist's experience does not appear in this thesis but does so elsewhere. See Ali (2011).

short documentary about an Iraq family living in Syria. He is now in the United States – I interviewed him in my apartment a few days before he left.

Baan

She is the daughter of Um Ahmed and in her early 20s. She lived in Ghazaliya in Baghdad. Her parents transferred her to a different school as intense fighting took place near her original school. She was a student at the Education for Iraqis Project (EIP) where I taught her academic English. I also gave her guitar lessons. She caused a stir at her school in Baghdad for being the first girl to start playing basketball and because she encouraged other girls to do the same. She is now studying for her undergraduate degree at an American university. I interviewed her in my apartment in Damascus and also interviewed her mother.

Bessaam

Also a student at EIP in his early 20s, he is now in America studying for an undergraduate degree. His family are originally from Hilla in southern Iraq but he grew up in a residential compound near the city of Fallujah. He studied dentistry briefly in Ukraine but corruption was so endemic there that he abandoned it to study for a specialist welding engineering qualification in Malaysia. I taught him during drama classes at EIP. I interviewed him in my apartment.

Farah

She is another bright and successful student from the EIP and is now studying for her degree in the United States. I taught her academic English at EIP. She also worked in an NGO in Baghdad which focused on local civil society activities. She studied design in a Baghdad institute but had long dreamt to study abroad. She had a strong desire to learn. She has a mellow voice but strong character: when she was 13, she refused to let Mehdi Army militia men enter her home. I interviewed Farah in my apartment in Damascus.

Hadi

A colourful and interesting spokesman for his community. He came from an important Mandaean family - his father was a Shaykh but also the King of Iraq's goldsmith and also a favoured goldsmith of subsequent rulers of the country. Hadi had been advocating for the Mandaeans for years before I met him and is a skilled public speaker. He played a key role in the committee which oversaw the first translation into Arabic of the Mandaean holy book – the Ginza Rabba. He was also a successful businessman. Sadly his business and advocacy activities were restricted and eventually put to an end by the occupation and dynamics released by it. Hadi is in his 50s and I interviewed him in his apartment in Jaramana. I met him when I was working as an interpreter for ILAS.

Haleem

Haleem is a Mandaean man in his 60s. He is also a writer and a retired teacher. He studied in the UK for an MA in English Literature. He is very talkative and enjoyed being interviewed. He told me that the thing he missed the most about Iraq was his date palm tree – he was sadder about leaving his tree than about leaving his home. I was introduced to Haleem through Hadi and interviewed Haleem in his apartment in Jaramana.

Hassan

Hassan worked as a barber in Damascus in the suburb of Sayidda Zaineb. He married a Syrian woman. I interviewed him in his apartment and was introduced to him by my research

assistant. He had studied Tourism and Hotel Management in Iraq but was unable to pursue a career related to his degree.

Jasim

I met Jasim when I was teaching academic English at EIP. He is now studying for his degree at an American university. He was passionate about physics and loved reading science fiction as well as watching it on the screen. He enjoyed playing computer games, listening to an eclectic range of music, and was also a huge fan of the American TV series *Lost*. I interviewed him in my apartment in Damascus.

Maher & Rania

They are artists in their mid-20s who now live in North America after being resettled there through the UNHCR process. I met them at parties in Damascus. Maher particularly enjoyed the social scene in the city. They were both able to exhibit some of their paintings at exhibitions of Iraqi art in Damascus. They were looking forward to leaving Syria for North America where they hoped they would be able to enjoy many of the things they missed out on growing up in Iraq.

Majeed

I met Majeed, a Baghdadi with origins in a Christian village in the north, whilst conducting a research study for the UNHCR in Syria. I interviewed him for that project about his employment situation in Syria and he later agreed to come to my apartment and be interviewed for this thesis research. He was in his late 30s and had worked in a printing press in Baghdad for years. Majeed also managed to acquire work in a printing press in Damascus thanks to help from his priest.

Mohsin

Mohsin is now studying in the United States thanks to EIP where I taught him briefly. Although in his early 20s he has the appearance of a man in his early 30s, likely because of the challenging experiences he has had since 2003. He was however a very vibrant character and his enthusiasm for life was infectious. I interviewed him in my apartment in Damascus where he also stayed briefly before moving house.

Najma

Anwar introduced me to Najma, a woman in her early 20s, but I got to know her very well through my work as an interpreter for ILAS. She had fled her abusive husband in Iraq and had moved home several times whilst in Damascus fearing that he may one day find her and their 2-year-old daughter – as he had threatened to. Najma had spent time in a women's shelter in Damascus but the conditions there were prison like and this resulted in her having a nervous breakdown before she left. She was also verbally abused by a UNHCR Protection Officer – something I complained about on her behalf. Najma now lives in North America.

Raz

I taught Raz, aged 20, at the EIP. He is a Baghdadi with origins in western Iraq. Raz was probably the most nationalist of all the EIP students I knew. He was an avid computer game player and also a gun enthusiast. He could identify different weapons by their sounds – but he told me that this was quite a normal thing amongst young men in Iraq today. Like other EIP students, he was an avid reader. Raz was also extremely self-confident and a very helpful individual. He is now studying at a university in the United States. I interviewed him in my

apartment in Damascus.

Sara

I met Sara when I was teaching at the EIP. She is from Baghdad and her father was an elite pilot in the Iraqi Airforce. She enjoyed the drama classes I co-taught at the EIP and seems to be a natural on the stage – she has taken up singing as an extra-curricular activity at her university in the United States. She was aged 19 when I interviewed her in a café in Damascus.

Sayf

I interviewed Sayf inside the UNHCR compound in Kafar Sousa, Damascus, for the employment study. He was a friendly and gregarious individual and had been the director of a large state-owned energy company in southern Iraq. I did not interview him at length for my PhD but the information he gave during conversations at the UNHCR were very interesting. He was in his 50s and originated from a province in southern Iraq.

Shaykh Rami

A goldsmith and a Mandaean priest in his 60s. Shaykh Rami was introduced to me by Hadi. I first met him when he was baptising Mandeans during a wedding ceremony. He was also training younger assistant priests that day. In his house in a Damascus suburb, he kept a goat and some chickens. The Shaykh was a very friendly and approachable man. I interviewed him in his house in Damascus with the help of Hadi who made some key interventions to prompt the Shaykh's memory of past events.

Um Ahmed

The mother of Baan, a student I met and taught at the EIP. She was a teacher in Baghdad but had family origins in Mosul. She was brave and of very strong character and managed her family's move to a safer neighbourhood almost alone and at times taking risks – such as when she returned to pick up furniture from the neighbourhood from which she had been displaced - without her husband's knowledge. I interviewed her twice in a restaurant in Damascus, close to my apartment. The batteries in my recorder died during the first interview and she kindly agreed to be interviewed again.

Yousif

Yousif is a bright and energetic young man, aged 20 at the time I interviewed him in my apartment in Damascus. He was something of a celebrity in the Chaldean Christian community as he had presented a TV show in a neo-Aramaic dialect on a recently established Iraqi satellite channel. Unfortunately he was unable to secure a place at a university in the United States with the EIP and returned to Iraq where he remains.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Below is the question set I had to hand during interviews. The main questions are lettered A to K and the sub-questions are numbered.

A) Could you tell me about your life before you left Iraq?

- 1) Where did you live in Iraq?
- 2) Who lived in your home with you before you left?
- 3) What is your profession?
- 4) How did you earn your living in Iraq?
- 5) What level of education did you attain and where did you study?
- 6) Tell me about your daily life in Iraq before the invasion in 2003?

B) Could you tell me about what your life was like in your neighbourhood before the invasion in 2003?

- 7) How long had you lived there?
- 8) Did you own or rent the place where you lived?
- 9) Tell me about your neighbourhood before the invasion in 2003.
- 10) What was it like in your neighbourhood before 2003?
- 11) What were your neighbours like?
- 12) Were there any neighbourhoods in your city that you felt were unsafe to visit before 2003?

C) After the invasion, how was your life affected?

- 13) Did anything change immediately after 2003?
- 14) Did your daily life change after the occupation?
- 15) Were there neighbourhoods that you felt were unsafe to visit after the invasion?
- 16) Were these neighbourhoods places you would have visited before 2003?
- 17) What was it about these neighbourhoods that made you think they were unsafe?
- 18) What information did you have about the danger?
- 19) How did you manage visiting neighbourhoods that you felt were unsafe?
- 20) Did anything change later?

D) What was your experience of healthcare in Iraq?

- 21) What was it like before the occupation? Did this change afterwards and when?

E) What was your experience of education in Iraq?

- 22) What was it like before the occupation? What changed afterwards, and when?

F) What was the situation like for people of your profession before the invasion?

- 23) Did this change after the invasion? When did these changes begin, and how did they develop?

G) Would you tell me about how you came to leave Iraq?

- 24) When did you leave Iraq?
- 25) Tell me about the day you left your home/Iraq.
- 26) Was there any particular event or events which triggered your decision to leave your home?
- 27) Had you thought of leaving before this event(s)? Were there any other times in the past when you wanted to leave Iraq? Why was that? Why didn't you leave then?
- 28) Did anyone make suggestions to you about your plans for leaving?
- 29) Did you hear anything on the radio/tv/ from anyone in the mosque / church / professional association that affected your decision?
- 30) How much time was there between making the decision to leave, and actually leaving?
- 31) What preparations did you make?

H) Were you the first person in your family, group of friends, or professional colleagues to leave?

- 32) If someone you knew left before you, did they help you to leave in anyway? Did you ask them for information or advice?
- 33) Have you helped anyone you know to leave their homes? Have you advised anyone about this?

I) Why did you choose Syria?

- 34) Did you already know people here?
- 35) Did you consult with them before leaving your home?
- 36) Where do you live now?
- 37) Have you always lived in this part of Syria?

J) Is there anything you would like to tell me that I haven't asked about?

K) If you and your family could live anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?³

³ I used this question as a way of closing the interview on a lighter note which I felt was important after prolonged discussions about difficult events in the past.

Appendix 3: Questions used by the IfPO-Oxford research project about decision making.

1. Basic information:

1.a Where did you live in Iraq before moving where you are now?

1.b Please tell us exactly where? (not just the *muhafazah*, but the precise location)

1.c What is your profession and how did you earn your livelihood before leaving Iraq?

1.d What level of education did you attain and where did you study?

1.e Are you married and do you have children? Are they here with you, and if not where are they (spouse and children)?

1.f Before you were displaced (or left), who was living in the same house with you (beyond the nuclear family: eg elderly relatives, or other relatives)?

2. Before 2003, was your life where you were living in Iraq generally secure? If not, how was it insecure?

After 2003, what was the main reason for your departure? Was there a particular event which caused you to leave? Did you feel that you and/or your family were in immediate danger? If yes, go to section 2.a; if not, go to section 2.b

2.a What type/degree of danger? Were you/members of your family under direct threat?

If so from who or what?

Before you left, did you feel it was necessary to protect yourself or your family in other ways (changing usual pattern of movements in relation to work, education, access to food and services, family and other visits, etc)?

Did you know about other such threats to other people around you, or more generally in Iraq? How did learn about them (family in Iraq or abroad, neighbours, wider community in Iraq or abroad, religious/political networks and institutions, armed groups, media and which ones, and who was talking through the media)?

Did this knowledge influence your decision? And how?

Did you conclude that you must leave over the course of days, months, weeks, years?

Do you believe that your decision to leave influenced others? And how?

2.b If you did not leave under a direct threat, how did you become aware it might be necessary to leave your usual place of residence?

Did problems relating to your job, access to services (education, health, etc), food/water supplies (food rations, shops, agricultural lands, etc), failure of public services (electricity, transportations, etc), possibility or security of movements etc influence your decision to leave?

Did the decision to leave of people you knew personally influence your decision and in which way?

Did you know about direct threats on other people around you, or more generally in Iraq? How did learn about them (family in Iraq or abroad, neighbours, wider community in Iraq or abroad, religious/political networks and institutions, armed groups, media and which ones, and who was talking through the media)?

Did this knowledge influence your decision? And how?

Before you left, did you feel it was necessary to protect yourself or your family in other ways (changing usual pattern of movements in relation to work, education, access to food and services, family and other visits, etc)?

Can you describe how the circumstances became progressively more difficult to the point that you felt you had no choice but to leave? Did you feel there were any other options?

Did you conclude that you must leave over the course of days, months, weeks, years?

Do you believe that your decision to leave influenced others? And how?

3. Was the decision to leave taken on your own (3.a), in consultation with others (3.b), or was the decision taken by others (3.c)?

3.a Did you feel it was necessary to consult other people before you made the decision (spouse, others members of the family in Iraq and abroad, friends in Iraq and abroad, neighbours, religious/tribal community members/leaders, others)?

Was the advice of some people more influential than others in helping you make the decision? How and why?

In your view who are the best people to make such decisions and why?

Do you know of conflicts in your family or community associated with the decision to leave?

3.b Who participated in making the decision (spouse, others members of the family in Iraq and abroad, friends in Iraq and abroad, neighbours/village, religious/tribal community members/leaders, others)?

What was the size/type of social group/collective within which the decision was taken; to which the decision applied; and who abided by decision? Were there some people who decided not to leave and/or who were unable to leave?

Were some people more influential than others in shaping the collective decision? How and

why?

In your view who are the best people to make such decisions and why?

Do you know of conflicts in your family or community associated with the decision to leave?

3.c If you were not involved in making the decision, who made it for you?

What was the size/type of social group/collective within which the decision was taken; to which the decision applied; and who abided by decision? Were there some people who decided not to leave and/or who were unable to leave?

Did you or others try to resist the decision or influence it?

Do you know of conflicts in your family or community associated with the decision to leave?

In your view who are the best people to make such decisions and why?

4. Did all the members of your family leave together? How did you decide on this? What influenced choice to leave together or leave in stages or phases?

4.a If departure was phased, who left first, who followed and when and who decided upon the pattern and timing of movement? Based on which elements?

5. What preparation did you make for your journey?

Sale or rent of properties (house, land, business, etc.), and moveable properties

Application for passports, visas

Collecting other documents (school certificates, etc.)

Transferring money to the place where you were going and how (*hawalah*, etc)

Finding residence in your intended destination (through relatives or others)

Organising with relatives or other people you knew to travel together

Seeking information about safety and conditions on your journey and at destination

6. What did you/others know about the risks involved in your journey in/from Iraq?

Did you travel directly to where you are now?

6.a If yes, what guided your decision to come here?

2. Your own previous knowledge of the place; family members who were here or had been here (marriage, study, transit migration, stage migration, labour migrations etc); other people and if yes, how did they have knowledge/information about this place; other sources of information (media, religious institutions/leaders, etc)?

3. Do you feel that you were able to exert a choice as to your current destination or that there was no other possibility?

6.b If not, can you retrace the trajectory, timing, decision making and information gathering at each stage that led you and your family members to this place?

At each stage, do you feel that you were able to exert a choice between staying or leaving, and between several possible destinations, or that there was no other possibility?

7. Are all the members of your family currently with you in this place?

7.a If not, where are they and why? Is their dispersal the result of choices made within the family or the result of constraints (keeping the property or the business, border closures, incapacity to move, etc)?

How does this separation influence your aspirations to stay in or leave this place?

8. Had you personally lived outside Iraq (or in other locations inside Iraq) before 2003?

8.a If you had not lived outside Iraq, had you wished to leave Iraq already before 2003?

8.a.a If yes, had you made previous attempts? To go where? Why were these attempts unsuccessful?

8.b If yes, when did you leave? To go where and for how long? How did you choose the place to which you migrated? Were there successive migrations to several places? When and why did you go back to Iraq?

9. Had other members of your close family (parents, brothers and sisters, spouse, children) left Iraq (or your habitual place of residence in Iraq) before 2003? When, to where and how long? Were there successive migrations to several places?

Would you say that their migration was the result of a choice of forced by circumstances?

How did they choose the place to which they migrated?

10. In retrospect, was your decision to leave Iraq (or your previous place of residence in Iraq) when you did the right one? Do people related to you (family, relatives, friends, etc) face continuing problem today? Would you recommend that they leave? Where would you recommend them to go?